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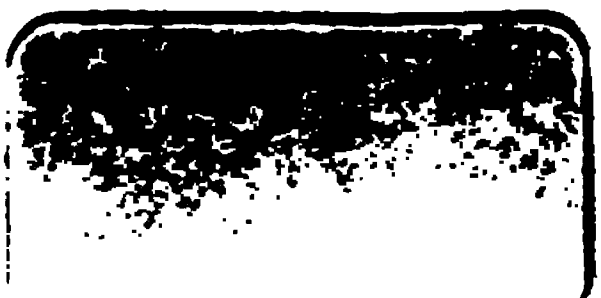
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LADY
of
KINGDOMS



BY HAYNES IRWIN





in

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12





1

THE LADY OF KINGDOMS

INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

FROM THE XLVII CHAPTER OF ISALAH

5. *Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called, The lady of kingdoms.*

* * * * *

8. *Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children:*

9. *But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments.*

10. *For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou has said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me.*

11. *Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.*

12. *Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail.*

13. *Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.*

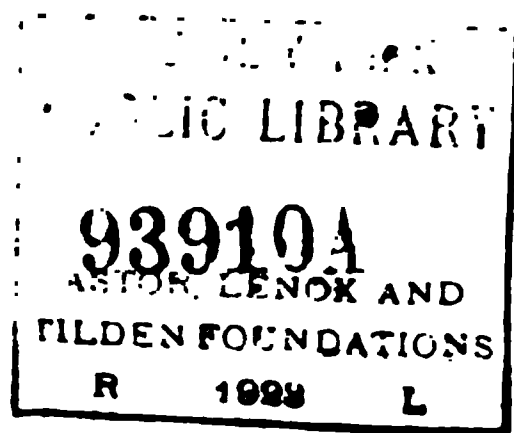
14. *Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.*

THE LADY OF KINGDOMS

BY
INEZ HAYNES IRWIN
AUTHOR OF "ANGEL ISLAND," ETC.



NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY



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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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TO MY BROTHERS

HARRY, GID, WALTER



BOOK ONE

THE LADY 'OF KINGDOMS

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

"WELL, you can't get a word out of her," Mrs. Wallis said in an accent compounded equally of virtuous disgust and balked curiosity. "No matter what you say to her. She says the child's hers, and who the father is ain't nobody else's business. And if anybody thinks they can go do any better, they've got my permission to try."

Mrs. Wallis's hard sharp black eyes, set high in her flat toad-like head, snapped a challenge to the three women who sat about the bed. With a double motion that was habitual to her, she fluffed up with one hand her mat of thickly-curled artificial hair and pushed down with the other a perpetually obtrusive corset-steel. "There ain't a drop of shame in her anywhere as far as I can see," she added irritably, turning to the woman who lay on the bed.

Mrs. Drake, to whom Mrs. Wallis addressed this last remark, emitted nothing beyond a nonplussed, "You don't!"

"Who'd have thought Gert Beebee would ever come to this pass?"—Mrs. Tubman took it up. Mrs. Tubman was a pasty, bulging, fatly-shapeless woman with one fixed dull eye and one roving bright one. "Why, I used to think she was a real clever little girl."

"She *was*," Mrs. Drake answered. "Smart as a whip, and bright as a dollar." She added after a pause, "Southward always said she liked her better'n most any girl 'cept Hester when they was in school together."

No one replied for a moment. And in that instant, the same expression dropped a non-committal curtain over the features of Mrs. Drake's guests.

"Well, all I've got to say," Mrs. Peters decided trenchantly, "is

that her smartness didn't do her a mite of good when she got into trouble. Smartness don't seem to be much help *then*, as others in this town may find out before it is too late."

Her words produced a little shocked flurry. Mrs. Drake alone listened placidly, seemed to see in them no esoteric meaning.

Mrs. Peters was a long, lean, lank woman with sandy hair. Her watery, undecided blue eye, her blue-white undecided skin, her irregular, undecided contour, could not prepare the observer for her strident voice and its accent of vinegar. She had a way of turning her eyes towards the object of vision but not her face. Half her solemn watery gaze had in that case to scale the high bony structure of her nose.

"Well, I'm awfully sorry for her for one," said Sue-Salome Hatch. "Libbie and I have always liked Gertie."

Sue-Salome was a spinster, middle-aged and girlish at the same time. Her method of arranging her hair—it was parted in the middle and drawn sleekly back to a hard round knot at the back—added to her years; but the slim trimness of her figure subtracted from them. There was something spaniel-like about her. Her broad-browed, narrow-jawed head was shaped like a spaniel's. Her brown eyes caught on things with the quick intelligence, half-mischief, half-interest, of the spaniel's glance. Her instinctive activity flowed at every move into the spaniel's wriggling swiftness. She was different from the other women in that her air suggested an unappeasable joy in life.

"Libbie still with her?" Mrs. Wallis asked.

"Oh, yes, she'll be there a week longer," Sue-Salome replied. "Libbie says Gertie's as easy to take care of—and she loves the baby to death. Well, it is a lovely baby—so healthy and good."

"Well, now, I suppose," Mrs. Drake said regretfully, "Gertie'll go the way Josie Caldwell did."

Mrs. Drake lay in the compelled quiet of a partial paralysis on a big bed that filled one corner of the chamber. Her invalid presence explained the odour in the air, the unanalysable, intangible, inevitable odour of sickness—made up of many components—innumerable medicines, perpetual hot water, the staleness of rooms too little aired and carpets too seldom swept. That odour seemed an appropriate emanation of the musty mid-Victorianism which surrounded her; it was accented by the heat of the August day. The room in which she lay, though a later annex to the colonial main house, had duplicated carefully its fine colonial lines. But its ceiling was stained, its paper discoloured. A faded carpet, over which sprawled Brobdignagian roses, covered the good, wide-

boarded, old floor. The black walnut set, painted a glaring blue, concealed with its mammoth massive bulks the airy elegance of the wood-work. The wide old mirror over the mantel would have offered the eye an escape from ugliness if a row of medicine bottles on the high narrow shelf had not balked it. In two directions only lay beauty—at the window where the phlox filed, white, pink, lavender, and purple, and through the door where nasturtiums and dahlias herded, orange and gold and crimson. Beyond lay trees massed to a dense greenness; above a stretch of blue sky.

After many years during which she had lain abed, Mrs. Drake was big and shapeless; but she was handsomely coloured for a sick woman. Curiously enough, she contrasted to her advantage with the women who sat about her. Her head-supported great coils of hair, the colour of hemp. Her cheeks retained twin-blooms of such a patchy vividness that they stood out like paint. Her eyes, set under dark lashes and brows, were as clear and unwinking as blue glass. Whatever the change in her mood, her colour neither deepened nor lessened, her eyes neither dimmed nor brightened, her brows neither lifted nor folded. When she spoke, only her lips moved. That was why, perhaps, her skin showed a wrinkle nowhere.

"I must confess it was the greatest surprise to me when Josie Caldwell went wrong," said Sue-Salome. "She was such an independent piece, so top-lofty. I'd never have thought it was in her to be bad. Why, when she used to come back from New York with all those beautiful clothes and jewelry, I swallowed her stories down as easy as—— It never entered my mind."

"Well, it entered *mine*," said Mrs. Wallis with a stinging emphasis. "Sue-Salome, you uster say to me, 'I can't explain it. I don't understand it.' And I uster say to you, 'Well, I can explain it,' s'I, 'perfectly easy,' s'I, 'in words of one syllable and all the nouns beginning with capital letters,' s'I. 'It's as plain to me as the nose on your face,' s'I."

"Gert says she's going to stay right along in this town," Mrs. Tubman put in, "although she does say it all depends on how they treat her here. If they ain't decent to her and the child, she'll get out. She says she can earn her keep and the baby's keep anywhere."

"I guess she can too," Mrs. Peters admitted reluctantly. "She's as strong as an ox. She got up yesterday, you know. They tried to keep her in bed but they couldn't. When Dr. Allen came, he

just laughed. He told me that she and the child were the healthiest specimens he'd handled in this town for *one* while."

"I'd hate to have her leave," Mrs. Tubman said dubiously. "She's the only woman you can get in this town to work. She's neat as wax and you don't have to keep after her. She don't charge all creation either."

"Yes, she often does up shirt-waists for Southward," Mrs. Drake said placidly. "They look handsome, I tell you."

Mrs. Wallis bristled. "Well, she won't do anything for me," she declared.

"She does for Flora sometimes," Mrs. Tubman remarked.

"Why, Pearl's almost got down on her bended knees to her," Mrs. Wallis went on indignantly.

"How is Flora?" Mrs. Drake interposed, turning her head and the conversation in Mrs. Tubman's direction.

"Oh, very well," Mrs. Tubman returned. "Pretty busy, though."

"I s'pose so," Mrs. Drake commented approvingly. "Sewing all the time, ain't she?"

"Pretty much," Mrs. Tubman admitted. "She's awful particular. If I didn't watch her, she'd hemstitch her dish-towels."

"The Curtises tickled to death over it, I suppose," Mrs. Drake went on.

"They seem to be," Mrs. Tubman answered, a subtle suggestion of antagonism in her manner.

"Well, Esther'll soon be coming along to have beaux," Mrs. Drake said, "and then the twins. Ain't it queer you never had nothing but girls? But I guess you ain't had no time to miss the boys."

"I guess I *ain't*," Mrs. Tubman said with conviction.

"How's Pearl?" Mrs. Drake now directed her unwinking blue-marble gaze at Mrs. Wallis.

"Oh, very well," Mrs. Wallis answered.

"She and Lysander going to make a match of it some day?" Mrs. Drake suggested.

Mrs. Wallis's hard, malicious mask froze. "I don't know as Pearl would have Lysander," she said smoothly.

"Well, she could go a long way and not do better," Mrs. Drake said judicially. "Lysander is a likely young feller. I wish Southward had taken a shine to him."

Mrs. Wallis bit her lips—perhaps to prevent words from snapping out of them.

"Pearl's an all-fired smart girl," Mrs. Drake went on, "but, land, all your children are smart—six of them. Lord, what a tableful!"

"You'd think so if you had to do the cooking," Mrs. Wallis said with an appearance of impersonal indignation.

"I suppose Pinkie and Thode Snow are still keeping company," Mrs. Drake turned to Mrs. Peters.

"Well, he's there every night if that's what you mean," Mrs. Peters answered, looking over her nose at her interlocutor.

"Pinkie's a nice pretty girl," Mrs. Drake said heartily. "They're all pretty girls. I'd admire some night to go to the Library and see them dancing those new dances. I guess——"

"Excuse me, Mis' Drake," interrupted Mrs. Wallis, "but there's a carriage just stopped outside—drove up the South Lane. Was you expecting any company?"

At once conversation ceased. The four visitors turned in their seats and craned towards the window.

"No," Mrs. Drake said placidly. "I wasn't. It's probably Southward."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Wallis in surprised tone. "That so? I didn't think she was coming until next week. Yes, it's Southward gitting out."

"I'm glad she's come," Mrs. Drake said in a relieved tone. "I certainly do miss Southward when she goes anywhere."

The other women did not speak, but a wave of uneasiness rolled through the room. They straightened themselves in their chairs, rearranged the folds of their skirts, patted their hair into place, stole surreptitious glances into near-by reflecting surfaces. Warnings shot from eye to eye.

The sound of footsteps, rapid and light on the stones outside, came through the open door. In an instant there started the joyous barking of a pair of dogs. The footsteps stopped an instant. A voice—clear, decided, boyish in effect—called, "Hullo, Buff! Hullo, Maida! Down, boy! Down, girl! *Down*, I say! Yes, I know you're glad to see me. What did I say? I said 'down!'" The voice went on.

"You never saw how crazy those dogs are about Southward!" Mrs. Drake commented admiringly. "They love her just the way they love a man. Gen'ally they're fonder of men-folks. But land, I don't wonder they take to her so. She loves them and they sense it. There ain't nothing so knowing as a critter. Southward washes them and feeds them when they're sick. I've known her to sit up all night with a dying dog. All the critters take to her.

I tell her sometimes she's a critter herself. My sister Sabry was clever with animals too—she was allus making of them."

No one of her four guests made answer. Obviously they did not hear. Obviously they were watching, waiting, though furtively. Outside the voice went on, talking to the dogs. Inside Mrs. Drake took up her comment again.

"But then again, Southward's just like a man in a lot of ways. When old Bess came to git so old and helpless that we had to help lift her onto her feet when she'd laid down, and crying all the time, Nathaniel wouldn't kill her—well, Southward, she took her out in the woods and shot her and buried her. Didn't come home for hours though. Land, she ain't no more afraid of a *gun*! Used to practise out behind the house with a pistol until she could shoot just as good as a man."

Again nobody spoke. Mrs. Drake's monologue tapered to silence. Outside the barking had stopped. The voice stopped. The quick light footsteps started again, came nearer. A girl's form, athletically slim, outlined itself against the screen. A girl's hand, slimly brown, came to the knob. The door opened quickly, letting in a wave of hot air, loaded with the smell, acrid and penetrating, of box with other odours, spicy and sweet, of mid-summer flowers. The door shut hard; the phlox at the window nodded with the concussion.

The girl, carrying a suit-case, stepped into the room. She was dark, vivid, handsome, at that instant brilliantly smiling. She stopped short.

"Well, hullo!" Her voice rang, but with surprise rather than pleasure. "Good afternoon, ladies." She set the suit-case down. Her brilliant smile faded to a composed impassivity. "This is a regular party, isn't it? Hullo, grandmother!" she darted to the bed and kissed Mrs. Drake. "Hullo, Sue-Salome." She drew off a loose pongee coat, threw it over the chair, drew a pin from her trim Panama hat, swept off the hat, stabbed it with a quick, clean stroke of the pin, tossed it on a table half-way across the room; drew off her long chamois gloves, tossed them with absolute accuracy after the hat; all this seemed one motion. Then she turned to the mirror and, admirably quiet, stood tucking stray locks into a main mass of sleek, straight, blue-black hair that, confined by a net, followed the outline of her head as close as a helmet. She talked busily all the time.

"My eye but it's hot! And the dust! Knee-deep on the road to the station. I've eaten *my* pint of dirt to-day."

Her grandmother's guests responded with subdued murmurs of

greeting which were immediately evaporated into silence by her own airy monologue. "Lysander bring you, Southward?" Mrs. Wallis managed to drag out of the confusion.

"Yes," Southward answered, in a tone whose casual languor was more non-committal than a direct snub. "Everything been all right, grandmother?" She darted to the bed again and leaned over Mrs. Drake, smiling affectionately down on her.

"Yes—'cept I missed you dreadfully," Mrs. Drake answered.

Southward patted her cheek, turned away.

In repose, she was like a leashed dog; her slim body seemed to thrill and vibrate. In motion, she was quicksilver; she accomplished everything with the minimum of effort and the maximum of speed and noise. At all times, energy and vitality seemed to pour from her. And now, gradually, she flooded the whole room with the tingling emanation of her spirit. The dull, dead air became high-coloured, illuminate, electrified.

The four guests, hostile but fascinated, followed every move.

"How are the Oldtown folks, Southward?" Mrs. Tubman asked.

"All right. Same as usual," Southward answered carelessly.

"Hear about Gert Beebee before you left, Southward?" Mrs. Peters questioned.

"Oh, yes." Southward paused in a dash to the dining-room.

"Boy, was it? Or was it a girl?"

"Boy," Mrs. Peters responded.

"How is Gert?" Southward inquired.

"All right," Mrs. Peters answered. "Not a word out of her yet though about the father. And nobody can make her tell. Why don't you see if you can get her to talk, Southward?"

"Because I don't think it's any of my business," Southward replied coolly. "If Gert wants to tell us, why it's all right. If not, it's none of our affair. It's all up to her."

"Why, Southward, I don't agree with you *at all*," Mrs. Wallis said with quiet venom. "It ain't proper that such things should be going on in this town, and us not knowing about it and not doing anything about it."

"Well, they seem to have been going on for many years," Southward answered with composure, "considering the illegitimate brats here. How are you to prevent it? Chaperone every girl in Shayneford or ask Shayneford people to live in glass houses?"

"You know that ain't what I mean, Southward," Mrs. Wallis said. "If we knew who the man was, we could make it hot for him. We might even prevail on him to marry her."

"Perhaps Gert doesn't want him to marry her," Southward said,

a glimmer of mirth in her dark eyes. "If it's one of those men we'd be most likely to suspect, perhaps she'd rather sidestep it. I'm sure I would. As it is now, Gert'll only have the baby and herself to support. If she married any of the Shayneford loafers, why she'd have him to support in addition. No, I think you can depend on Gert to run her own affairs. She's no fool. For my part, I don't think it was a Shayneford man. I give Gert credit for better taste."

There was an interval of tense silence. Mrs. Drake, placidly oblivious of the social crisis, awaited the next remark. Southward, moving swiftly about, putting her things away, straightening the room here and there, whistled through her teeth as though she were alone.

"You going to the bazaar, Southward?" Mrs. Peters asked finally.

"Yes. Libbie asked me to take a table and I said I would. No, it's the fishing-pond—come to think of it."

"Well, girls," Mrs. Wallis said. "I've got to be going. It must be after five. What train d'you get, Southward? The three?"

"Yes." Southward consulted a little wrist-watch. "It's half-past five," she said.

"Mercy me," Mrs. Tubman exclaimed. Her roving eye sent a scuttling glance about the room and her dull eye grew opaque. "I hope Flora's remembered to put some water on to boil. Well, I must be going."

This sentiment was promptly re-echoed by the other four. They collected hats and wraps. They said cordial good-byes to Mrs. Drake and reserved ones to Southward. Southward held the screen-door open for them. They retreated down the path between the dahlias and the nasturtiums, emitting a cautious comment now and then. As they turned into South Lane and disappeared under the tunnel of its trees, conversation broke with a gush.

"Cats!" Southward commented cheerfully, turning to her grandmother.

"Southward," Mrs. Drake said seriously, "sometimes I don't think Mis' Wallis likes you."

Southward laughed. "*Likes* me, grandmother. She hates me. They all do. Any one of them would boil me alive. They're having the time of their life now, ripping me up the back—all except Sue-Salome of course. I'm so glad I happened to have my new waist on. It will give them something to start with."

Mrs. Drake's eyes moved appraisingly over Southward's slim

figure. Her gaze dwelt on the new waist with appreciation of the workmanship, with dissatisfaction as she noted the elaboration of tucks and insertion.

"Get that in Oldtown?" she asked.

"Yes," Southward answered, "they had a sale at the hotel—a New York firm. How do you like it?"

"It'll be hard to do up," Mrs. Drake commented.

"Yes, I suppose it will," Southward agreed indifferently, "but you know, grandmother, I never object to ironing my own waists."

"Hullo, Southward!" a voice interrupted from the other room. It was a man's voice. Steadily advancing, it continued: "I saw you drive up but I wouldn't come in as long as the women-folks were having their pow-wow. Such a cackling! I couldn't bear myself think! I took the noospapers and went into the parlour."

The owner of the voice appeared in the doorway and stood there smiling sardonically. He was old. He was striking. Once he must have been tall. Once he must have been enormous. Now his figure was bent almost double with continual cramp. Yet broken as he was, he seemed a gorilla for strength and he was still handsome. He looked Southward's kin.

Southward ran to meet him, kissed him affectionately. "It was a specially successful session, Cap'n, as far as I could gather. They were pulling poor Gert Beebee to pieces."

Mr. Drake emitted a short ironic laugh. "It'll kill Sarah Wallis if she don't find out who the man is soon. She never came up against such a proposition as this. Why, I remember——"

"Hullo, Southward!" another voice interrupted from the other room.

"Hullo, Charlotte!" Southward answered.

"Dinner's ready!" the voice went on. It was a woman's voice and it was retreating.

Still talking busily with her grandfather, Southward followed the voice into the dining-room, sat down with him at a table laid for three. "I thought I'd get you in here," the voice continued, "and then I'd dish out the corn, so's to be sure to have it served hot. Got hot biscuits," it added.

"You're a darling, Charlotte," Southward answered, in a voice uncharacteristically warm and tender. "I hope you calculated on my appetite, coming from Oldtown. Six ears of corn and a dozen hot biscuits at least, I should say."

"Oh, I callulated," the voice replied. "Here we be!" it added in another instant. Its owner appeared in the kitchen doorway,

a dish of hot corn steaming in one hand and a dish of hot biscuits steaming in the other.

She was a tall, flat woman blackly dark. It was apparent that she was blind or nearly so; the stigmata of her malady made smoky blurs over her bulging, black, beetle-like eyes.

She walked with extraordinary straightness and precision considering her blindness. Now, with the same accuracy, she put down the two dishes, pulled the third chair from the table, and seated herself. Southward kissed her cheek.

Mr. Drake reached across the table and helped himself to an ear of corn. He slapped a square of butter on it, salted it, and began to gnaw. "There are two young fellows come down here since you went away, Southward," he said. "Camping—other side of Long Pond."

"Are there?" Southward asked languidly. She helped herself to the corn, but although she ate from the cob, she handed it delicately, as though it were blown glass.

"Yes—got here Saturday night—using the Snow camp—put up two tents—expecting two more fellows later—don't know what they need so many places for, though." Mr. Drake's chawings made dashes between his phrases. "One big tent and one small one—Lysander helped them get settled—pretty ship-shape over there now—Lysander was saying. Going to stay a month."

"A month," Southward repeated languidly. "Curious Lysander didn't mention it to me. Come to think of it though, I talked all the time." In spite of her boast of an appetite, her movements were uninterested. Occasionally she buttered and salted her corn with her characteristic clean precision of movement. But every time she glanced at her grandfather, who chewed audibly and visibly, a vertical frown drew her brows to level black lines. Immediately she would straighten, would adjust her corn-cob to even greater delicacy of position. Her fingers spread over its end like the pink-tipped tendrils of a vine, but they held it tight. She nibbled prettily.

It was extraordinary how much alike they were as they sat there—Southward and her grandfather—despite the difference in their ages. Southward's clean-cut, hawk-like profile was not more regular than her grandfather's, although she was twenty-five and he seventy-five; nor was his more vigorous than hers, although he was a man and she a woman. His profile sank soon into the volume of his long, white, cleanly-flowing beard. The boldly-chiselled nose predicated in his case a masculine translation of the delicious squareness of Southward's lower lip, the virile square-

ness of her chin. And Southward's brow, from which the thick black hair swept cleanly away, seemed to promise a duplicate under the long white locks that covered Mr. Drake's temples. The fire of a youthful enthusiasm glowed in both pairs of eyes; and although his were blue and hers black, they had the same straight-lashed directness of gaze, the same wide-open clarity. Mr. Drake was an arresting old man and Southward was a compelling young woman. But Southward's figure was comely. In addition she was brilliantly-coloured in the tints of youth and summer.

It was an hour when, to the most sensitive perception, Long Lanes must seem charged with a tragic melancholy. The sun was rolling rapidly down the sky into the woods in front. Its light flooded through the windows and doors. But it was not bright, it was light that would soon become shadow. It gathered in blood-coloured pools under the furniture, fell in blood-coloured spots on the table, spattered in blood-coloured splotches upon the wall. It set ruby patches in Nathaniel Drake's white hair and beard. It burnished Southward's jet-coloured hair; it seemed to bring out in it underlying ripples of red. It added to the melancholy that in this fiery glow the rooms showed all the ravages of careless housekeeping.

"Bring in some more corn, Charlotte." Mr. Drake took the last ear on the plate. "Yes, Lysander was saying one of them fellers is named Cameron and the other Smith. Lysander didn't know their first names. I'll find out in the Post Office to-night. But of course you'll get to know them. Then I s'pose they'll all be over here, underfoot from morning till night."

Southward did not reply. But an amused smile rippled her brilliant lips, glimmered in the depths of her blue-and-black eyes.

"Sue-Salome was saying to-day that they'd come from New York City." Charlotte emerged from the kitchen with another dish of corn, steaming between her hands.

"*New York!*" Southward repeated electrically. She dropped her corn, put down her napkin, and pushed away from the table, all in one movement. She stared off into the distance. The other two went on audibly gnawing.

After a moment, Mr. Drake answered the question in her voice. "Yes, they're all from New York, Lysander said. Sort of high-brows too." Southward made no comment. He went on talking with Charlotte, rehearsing other Shayneford gossip and making his own shrewd comments thereupon. From time to time, Charlotte inserted a remark or asked a question. Southward answered at random the queries they put to her.

Presently she arose from the table and went to the window. She leaned her head against one hand and drummed on the glass with the other. Charlotte's face puckered sensitively under the nervous irritation of this noise. But it was evident that Southward herself did not hear it. Her eyes looked straight ahead to the point where the sun blared in a sheet of red flame through the pines. And it was evident that she did not see that. The glare hurt her eyes as little as the noise her ears. Her face had changed. Under its cool boyish *insouciance*, something stirred—an emotion stronger than mere interest—something more intense, alert, almost predatory.

"Come in and talk with grandmother," she said when Mr. Drake had finished his supper.

"Oh, that reminds me," said Charlotte. "Sue-Salome wanted I should tell you that Hester Crowell was coming over to-night. How'd she know you'd be at home?"

"I wrote her," Southward answered over her shoulder. With a return of her characteristic buoyant air, she followed her grandfather's painful hobble through the parlour into the chamber.

"How'd the corn taste, mother?" Mr. Drake inquired.

"It tasted moreish, Nathaniel," Mrs. Drake replied. "What's Hester coming over for?" she asked Southward.

"Oh, nothing in particular," Southward asserted indifferently. "Just to talk."

"Mis' Crowell busy as usual, I suppose?"

"I suppose so, grandmother," Southward responded, a little impatience in her voice now. "Of course I haven't seen anybody in Shayneford for a week."

"Of course," Mrs. Drake agreed with her customary placidity. "She's a smart woman, Mis' Crowell," she said admiringly.

"Yes, and a terrible one," Southward added with a sudden fierceness. "I hate her. She makes Hester's life a hell, I tell you."

Charlotte came into the room at this moment, carrying a lamp. She made a straight line for the table, placed it accurately in the centre, turned the wick slowly up. For an instant the strong glare changed her face to a putty mask with holes for shadows. Then as though by instinct, she turned it down to a steady glow. Her face became human again. The grotesque shadows in the corners of the big room scurried up the walls to the ceiling, vanished in the final flood of steady light.

The three elders engaged in a conversation from which Mr. Drake gradually retreated to his paper. Southward remained

silent. Her eyes wandered. From where she sat she could get a glimpse of half of the lower floor of the big house.

First came the chamber where lingered always the semi-fetid odour of sickness lapsing by imperceptible degrees to death. Beyond and at one side stretched the parlour, frigid as a tomb even in that hot August weather. Furnished in the taste of the present Mrs. Drake, it displayed a set of black walnut and haircloth as shiny as the day on which it was bought, mortuary wreaths of waxed flowers or hair, stuffed birds under glass bells, crocheted tidies. The fire-place, which would have given even that tomb-like cube a soul, had been sealed with a sheet of iron painted black on which had been pasted many gay-coloured embossed pictures. From the wall, two engravings, "Rock of Ages" and "From Shore to Shore," breathed, by their cruel and untimely warning, an extra element of melancholy into the sepulchral atmosphere. A centre-table, covered with a red woollen cloth, ornamented with stamped figures, bore a huge Bible surrounded by other books of a religious character. Even the type of its literature added to the gloom.

The mantel, noble in itself, many tables of a depressing modern tawdriness, a what-not, quaintly mid-Victorian, were laden with objects that were the accumulation of Mrs. Drake's lifetime—a collection from which nothing had ever been rejected and in which anything that had ever been broken had been carefully mended and the cracked side concealed; vases filled with pampas-grass and cat-o'-nine-tails; faded sea-fans, huge shells, prettily pink-lipped or pearly or iridescent, or hideously horned or spiked or spotted; the trophies in globes and bottles from glass-blowers' exhibitions; the apple stuck with clove; the melancholy gift-books of which the gilt lettering was fading, the worn photograph albums of which no clasp clutched and all the backs were breaking; the piles of daguerreotypes; the faded photographs; the stark tin-types; the futile litter of "hand-painted" things. Immeasurably that welter of uncorrelated ugly detail increased the unlivable quality of the room.

Next came the dining-room with its jig-sawed oak set, the spindly joggly slant-top desk, the high, ungainly over-decorated and over-mirrored sideboard, the oak table and chairs tortured with unnecessary ornament, the bad modern china, pale and anæmic in colouring, the cabinet of meagre cut glass, the supper growing cold on the blue and red cloth; and on each wall, placed in a centre mathematically accurate, a picture of a ship commanded by one of Southward's sea-going ancestry.

Southward's eyes went from the things to the people; a trio quite as depressingly battered; her grandmother's moveless bulk, her grandfather's crippled age, Charlotte's blank melancholy. The alert keen look—still slightly predatory—died in her face. The blue and black shimmer went out of her eyes, the ripple vanished from her brilliant lips. Her foot began to tap the floor slowly, quickly, quicker and even more quick. Suddenly she jumped to her feet, lighted a candle.

"Tell Hester to come right up into the garret, grandmother," she said and she seemed by main force to be holding some savage emotion out of her voice.

Seizing her suit-case, she hurried out into the hall, turned and went racing up the stairs. One long broad flight, bounded by a balustrade with white banisters and a mahogany rail, brought her into a square hall from whose walls the painted eyes of many Drakes stared down at her. Another flight, perceptibly narrower but like the other, marked by a colonial beauty, brought her to a small hall. A third flight, boxed in by walls and plainly utilitarian, led indisputably to the garret.

CHAPTER II

IN the light that came from the windows, the outlines of the garret showed clear. It covered the entire square of the original house, the railed opening breaking through the floor at one end. At a height of a few feet, the walls merged with the roof, ran at a gentle angle up to the peak. The windows looking out under heavy eaves were broad and low; they came nearly to the floor.

Southward dropped the suit-case. She moved over to the table, fumbled there an instant until she found a match. Shielding the flame with one hand and constantly renewing it, she lighted an astral lamp on the table, crystal lamps at opposite ends of the table, brass candles at intervals between. It was strange, coming from the stiffness and dinginess and mustiness of downstairs, that she did not gasp. For in the light of the first lamp, the room began to bloom with soft colour; at each extra illumination, it unfolded petals of a deeper tinting until, in the united blaze, it flared like a monstrous exotic flower. About her, in background and furnishings, lay a wild vivid *mélange* of Orient and Occident, antiquity and modernity, subtle perturbing colour, classic, tranquillising form.

The walls and roof—it gave a curious pavilion-like aspect to the place—were draped in a thin, crépy, lustreless material. Shaded in tint, it must originally have run all the changes from a dim pink through luminous yellows and glowing oranges; now it was faded and blurred and sheened to a blend of all these hues. Superimposed on this background everywhere was more colour—pure colour—deep colour—and deeper—Chinese stuffs—coats, skirts, formless pieces of drapery. Over the arms of the graceful Sheraton couch which filled one corner they lay; over the *chaise-longue* which protruded at right angles from the wall; over the backs of chairs of bamboo intricately braided, of mahogany delicately inlaid, of teak boldly carved. Torn and old, they still rioted in unbelievable discords of contrasted colour, they still united in incredible harmonies of toned shades, they still preserved the high lights of gold embroideries. Above, wherever jutting joists or protruding beams offered a resting-place—dead white against the faded rose of their background—stood nude Greek

figures, statuette-size in plaster. On the top of the slant-topped maple desk—dead white against a panel of black velvet—marched a procession of Tanagra figurines. And on the walls between, pinned up everywhere with thumb-tacks, were pictures of the nude in colour, in black and white, in photogravure, cut from the magazines.

A strong breeze was coming in the east window; it rattled the papers on the big central table. Southward shut the windows. She drew on one of the Chinese robes. It was a prince's coat of tomato-coloured satin, the seven-toed dragon brilliantly outlined over the breast, the bottom deeply edged with the rainbow-wave pattern. It fitted perfectly the long-lined hiplessness, the low-busted flatness of her boyish figure. The dark sleeves, although they flared at the wrists, clung tightly to her slim arms.

Sitting on the couch for an interval of unaccustomed stillness, Southward's eyes wandered vacantly about the garret. They fell finally on the suit-case in the middle of the room. Leaping up immediately, she pounced on it, snapped it open. On the top were her clothes; these she threw ruthlessly about, rummaging. Underneath came bundles, writing-paper, a magazine, a book—last of all a revolver. These she placed on the table. Then walking back and forth the width of the garret she put the other things away. Some went into the drawers of an old sideboard of mahogany, gracefully inlaid, studded with gleaming, lambent brasses. Others disappeared in a high secretary in Chinese Chipendale, coloured scarlet and covered with painted scenes. Over the sideboard stretched a long wide mirror, divided into three parts by a frame of gold. Beside the secretary hung a high narrow mirror divided into two parts by a frame of mahogany. Their dimmed surfaces kept passing Southward's reflection from one to the other until there stretched into an infinity of distance countless duplications of the brilliant red-and-gold figure. The empty garret seemed to be besieged by files of Chinese princes.

The centre-table supported a staggering weight of books, magazines, papers. On it an old writing-box of inlaid maple lay open, paper, envelopes, blotters tossing out. To this confusion—one corner of which she cleared with a single ruthless sweep of her arm—Southward added a slim glass decanter, half-filled with wine, two slim glasses of old cut which she brought from the sideboard. From an old card-table which stood, one leaf up, against the wall, she transferred to the table a big box of cigarettes.

This done, she returned to the couch, settled herself to another period of stillness. Her eyes, roving from spot to spot in the

garret, gradually grew intense, preoccupied, predatory. With another sudden movement, swift and direct as an eagle winging from peak to peak, she darted to the east window. She had to kneel to look out.

Just below sprawled a big-stemmed vine. Beyond, surged star-pricked distance and darkness—impenetrable. Southward arose, sighed impatiently. She walked back and forth the length of the garret a dozen times. Stopping half-way across the room, she turned abruptly to the secretary, took out Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. She threw herself down on the day-couch. Moving a candle close to her head, she opened the book at random and began to read. At first the leaves turned quickly, but after a while they moved slower and slower until they ceased to turn at all. The book fell from her hands to the cushions. Her hands went up to the back of her head, clasped there. Her eyes set themselves on space; the keen alert look returned to them. She meditated without stirring.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet, listened. Something was happening downstairs. That faint indescribable stir which heralds arrival came soundlessly wafted to the garret. Another moment brought the noise of footsteps on the stairs. Another and a head appeared in the stair-opening—a head piled with great braided masses of vivid golden hair—a long white neck—shoulders that sloped and stooped.

The head lifted—turned——

CHAPTER III

"*Ave*, lady of kingdoms!" the girl exclaimed, coming forward. The light caught her, made a glory of her hair, revealed a face disappointingly colourless and characterless.

"*Ave*, lady of kingdoms!" Southward answered, falling back against the cushions, "I'm glad to see *you*. There's nobody like you anywhere, Hetter."

"You're the only one that feels that way, Southward," said Hester Crowell. She stopped suddenly and gazed about her. "Candles!" she exclaimed melodramatically. "Tear down the walls for—— What does this mean?"

"Only celebration of reunion." Southward's hands clasped behind her head again; a glimmer of mirth came into her eyes. "And perhaps a little—a very little—anticipation of conquest."

"Oh, the New York men," Hester said. "I might have gathered."

"Yes. Tell me about them. I've been asleep at the switch. I didn't even know they were here."

Before replying, Hester pulled from her hair a half a dozen hairpins, long, curved, heavy—of silver. A thick braid of hair that covered the entire back of her head slid down over her shoulder past her waist until it touched the hem of her gown. Before she seated herself, she drew over her faded, shapeless muslin dress the Chinese coat that lay over the *chaise-longue*. It was a soft thin silk; originally an acid lemon in colour, it had toned to a pearly softness. Bands of embroidery in peacock blues and greens trimmed the edges; and these were set with a decoration of tiny mirrors. The mirrors winked in the candle-light.

"It's a long story." Hester seated herself at the centre-table. Her elbow parted the papers there. She started, suppressed a scream, jumped to her feet. "Is that thing loaded, Southward?" she demanded.

"Oh, you coward!" Southward answered with amused disdain. "Of course it is. What good is it—*not* loaded?"

She arose languidly and put the revolver into one of the drawers of the secretary.

"I don't see why you keep it round," Hester protested, "*especially loaded*."

"There's no danger, Hetter," Southward reassured her. "Nobody's ever been in this garret since we fixed it up but you. And I repeat that's what I want a gun for—to be ready when I need it." Returning to the table, she poured the slim glasses half-full of wine. She handed one to Hester, took one herself. They lifted them. And suddenly they broke into a rhythmic chant:

To see the world!

To live our lives!

Not to submit to the tyranny of things.

To be friends, yet never to ask questions and to leave each other free.

It was as though they had performed this ritual a thousand times. They made no comment on it; only drank.

Southward handed the cigarettes to Hester, lighted a match, held that out to Hester, lighted her own cigarette, shook out the match in four vigorous movements. Then she returned to the *chaise-longue*. Seating herself cross-legged upon it, she began to send volleys of smoke-rings across the room. She smoked with the *insouciance* efficiency that marked all her movements, inhaling deeply and without effort. But Hester seemed more an amateur. She drew on her cigarette too frequently and before she could have tasted it, emitted the smoke in hurried gasps. She talked—but it was evident all the time that she was conscious of the firebrand that hung between her slender forefinger and thumb.

"Did you have a good time in Oldtown?" Hester asked.

Southward makes an impatient gesture. "So-so, Hetter. I'll talk about that later. Tell me about the New York men."

"There are four of them," Hester began promptly as though primed for this question. "At least there *were*. Two of them have gone for a tramp. I'll begin with those still here. Number one, Dwight Cameron. I haven't seen him, but they say he's very handsome, very athletic, very gay, very charming. How does that sound?"

"Sounds pretty good to me," Southward answered. "Go on!"

"Number two—believe it or not—John Smith," continued Hester.

Southward laughed. "I've always thought I would like to meet John Smith. Take it from me, he's an average kind of person."

"They say not in this case," Hester went on. "He's quieter than Mr. Cameron but exceedingly interesting and courteous.

Number three is—or was—he's one of the two that went off on the walking-trip—Morena O'Reilly, half Irish and half Spanish—war-correspondent—globe-trotter—so handsome that it hurts, and an awful flirt. What do you say to that?"

"*Embarras de richesse* is wot I say," responded Southward. She picked out another cigarette, lighted it at the stub of the first, poked out the stub, leaned back on the couch whirling smoke-rings. "Lead me to it. Who's he been flirting with?"

"Oh, all the girls—they don't know him yet—but they say that—Pearl, Pinkie, Flora, Lydia, Mercy."

"I'll have to put a stop to that at once," said Southward, a glimmer coming between her eye-lashes.

"I knew you would." Hester laughed.

"Any dope on number four?" Southward asked.

"A reformer," Hester answered.

"Doesn't interest me *at all*," Southward remarked with conviction and emphasis.

Hester laughed again. "I guessed that. After all, Southward, you're not very eclectic."

"Well, I do draw some lines. What's his name?"

"Ripley Fearing. They call him Rip."

"Grand name for a reformer," Southward commented. "Almost prejudices me in his favour. Now I wonder which one of the other three it will be?"

Hester smiled an indulgent smile. "It will probably be all three—or four. Mr. Fearing's reformer inclinations won't protect him."

"Not if I like him," Southward admitted with a ghost of a glimmer. "Four is a very awkward number though. Go on."

"That's positively all I know," said Hester. "I haven't seen one of them yet."

"Oh, I'd know *that*!" Southward contemplated her with an amused smile.

"Now tell me about Oldtown."

"Oh, it was what it always is. After the first few days, I nearly smothered. Bad as it is here, at least I have this secret place. I can smoke if I want." She looked approvingly about the garret. "I really longed to get back. But when I arrived, all the old cats of Shayneford were here, discussing Gert Beebee. Hester, I give you my word, listening to them made me almost sick. I developed such a grouch—combination of discontent and disgust—those old women, the illness in the house and the general gone-to-seedness of the whole proposition. I felt ripe for anything. Hester,

it's the truth. I can't stand another year of it. I can't. I won't. Something's got to break. Just let's get together and beat it."

Hester shook her head. "I can't," she said soberly, "although——" She did not finish but she raised her long arms over her head in what was unmistakably a passionate gesture of revolt. She dropped them at once. "What did they say about Gert?" she asked in an even tone.

"Oh, the regular thing. Tried to set me on to her—to find out who the father is. I made short work of that proposition." Southward's eyes glowed with a reminiscent enjoyment of her own causticity. "I told them that if I were Gert, I wouldn't marry any of the crowd who would be likely to want to marry me. Such a shambling, shiftless, degenerate crowd! But then look at the other Shayneford men—the men we know—King Curtis, Thode Snow, Zoeth Crafts—all of them except Lysander. Now could you see one of them as a husband—even if he were the best man on earth?"

Hester shook her head. "It might seem a case of sour grapes for me to say that, although I do say it. But you could have married any one of them."

"Lysander's the only real man in town," concluded Southward, "and he comes pretty close to filling the bill. But then the girls aren't much better. Pinkie's a fox, Pearl's a cat, and Flora's a cow. How I despise them all!" She said this with impatience but she added with a distinct sense of enjoyment, "And how they all hate me!"

"Well," said Hester, "they ought to. I don't blame them a bit. They want to marry and you've kept most of them out of matrimony by making a conquest of the only eligible men in town. Then you know, Southward, if one of the men ever makes a move towards one of them, you always yank him back." She surveyed her companion severely.

Southward laughed. She looked a little shamefaced.

"Now Pearl, for instance," Hester went on. "She's crazy about Lysander. And I don't suppose Lysander'll ever get over being in love with you. You won't let him."

"They get over everything sooner or later," Southward remarked cynically. "However, you're wrong there, Hetter. I've always played square with Lysander. I like him too much. I'm perfectly square with other men, for that matter. Only sometimes when they start developing a crush, I'm not quite so harsh as I might be."

"You're a devil," Hester remarked. Then as one who has said

it many times before, "'Therefore, hear now this, O Lady of Kingdoms, thou that are given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine own heart, I am and none else beside me. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness, thou hast said None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee.'"

"Well," said Southward, her eyes shining with mischief, "at least I get things done, Hetter. And believe me, I shall yet be the one to pull you out of this here Shayneford land of Canaan into that there New York land of Israel. If it weren't for me, you'd sit here and mope and moon for the rest of your life, drugging yourself with all that dope—Plato, Thomas à Kempis, St. Augustine, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus—Emerson. That old-time philosophy isn't getting you anywhere. As for that, I can pull some Lady-of-Kingdoms stuff myself. I read that chapter in Isaiah while I was in Oldtown and I decided that if half of it applies to me, the other half applies to you." She too began to quote: "'Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels, O Lady of Kingdoms. Let not the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators——'" She paused to cast an oblique liquid glance in the direction of the book on the table, "'Stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; there shall not be a coal to warm nor fire to stir before it.'"

Hester smiled. "Your prophecies sound good to me, Southward. After all, anything is better than this killing monotony."

"How is Matt, by the way?" Southward asked.

"All right, I guess."

"I bought him an old book in Oldtown," Southward remarked. "I wish Matt were young. He must have been some man—and as he is, at seventy, I like him better than any other man in Shayneford except Lysander."

"He's a darling," Hester agreed warmly. Then in a meditative tone: "It would be queer if you married Lysander sometime, Southward, wouldn't it?"

"Yes. But I won't. Oh, say—how is the Bazaar going?"

"Like all the rest of them. You're to have the fish-pond and I'm to have the cake-counter. All the other girls have agreed to go in costume."

Southward laughed. "I might have known they would—especially with the town full-up with New York men." She laughed again—a laugh of pure enjoyment with an edge of malice on it.

"I wouldn't have missed it for a farm down-east. It'll be a scream."

"Well, they *are* pretty girls, Southward," Hester interposed. "You must admit that."

"They would be if they knew how to dress," Southward decided judiciously. "But Pearl's got too big a beak; Pink's eyelids are too red. Flora's underlip hangs. There isn't one of them as good looking as Gert Beebee used to be or as smart as Josie Caldwell is now. Josie really has style."

"It's queer, isn't it," Hester said in a meditative tone, "that the two girls who've turned out so bad were our favorites? You've always stood up for Gert and I for Josie. It's very curious about Gert. I didn't expect anything like this of her. She was certainly one of the most promising of the girls we went to grammar-school with. She could beat anybody in the class at mental arithmetic—do you remember? Her mind worked like a flash."

"Oh—sure!" Southward agreed. "But outside of that—I mean in play—it was always nip and tuck between her and me as to which could climb the highest, run, swim, or skate the fastest. And she was so pretty then!"

"Do you remember what a little gipsy she was when we used to go bathing together? She always wore some ragged old dress. Yet how white her skin was—and how picturesque she'd look! I'm sorry for Gert. I'm making the baby some little bonnets—you know, those handkerchief arrangements."

"I'm sorry too," said Southward. "I bought the baby two little dresses in Oldtown. Of course Gert's lost some of that wild beauty. She's grown big and a little blowsy. But she's a pippin compared with any of the girls of our age who've been married for five years. Take Aline Allen—I saw her in Oldtown—you remember what a lovely thing she was!"

"Perfectly. When I was a little girl, she was my idea of an angel."

"I wish you could see her now. She's had five children, and she's had them just as fast as they could come. She looks like a string-bean. All that lovely colour's gone. Her hair is thin and dull. She stoops—oh, she's a shipwreck. That's another of my objections to matrimony. See what it does to women. They all get either scrawny and round-shouldered or fat and tubby, lose their hair, teeth, and complexions. Now on the other hand, take Josie Caldwell. They say dreadful things about her and I guess they're true. Yet the last time she came here, she certainly put

it all over the girls who graduated with her for looks and style. And she used to be such a quiet, colourless, unassertive thing."

"The other girls have had children too often and have worked too hard between times," Hester said. "That's what marriage must mean for the majority of women, I suppose."

"Not for mine then," Southward declared flippantly. "Why, Hetter, I can't endure even the thought of marriage!"

"Southward," Hester asked suddenly, "how many proposals of marriage have you had?"

Southward meditated. "I don't know exactly. Let me see. Six or seven I should say. I suppose perhaps I could have had more. But you see, Hetter, I'm not really a flirt." And at Hester's smile. "No, I'm *not*. I like conquest and I look upon men as legitimate prey; but I don't let it go as far as a proposal if I can possibly help it. I'm too good a sport for that. When it gets down to cases, I make a declaration of independence. And I slip it in just as soon as I can. 'I'm not a marrying woman,' I say. 'I don't want to marry, but I like to flirt. You take care of yourself and I'll take care of myself. A man doesn't interest me at all after I've got him going. Now we're off.'"

"And what effect does that have on them?" asked Hester with interest.

"It's a shame to take the money. But if after that they burn their wings, I don't consider that it's my fault. They do though, and frequently. And the letters they write. That thing, by the way,"—she waved her hand towards the writing-box on the table,— "is full of them. Help yourself."

Hester pulled the box towards her, lifted the cover. It was filled with packages of letters. "Do you mean to tell me that I can read these if I want?"

"You can," said Southward. "I've had no scruples ever since I discovered that one drummer person was in the habit of reading my letters aloud to his friends. Not that there was anything in them that I was ashamed of——"

"Well," said Hester in a hesitating voice, "if you don't care, I don't see why I shouldn't." Her hand went out slowly, withdrew, became a white flutter inside the box. She slipped off the elastic band from a packet of letters.

For an interval the garret was silent. Southward smoked tranquilly, now and then blowing a volley of rings.

Suddenly Hester burst into laughter. "Oh, Southward," she exclaimed, "how could you!" She read on. "Oh, you—you—you!" she concluded impotently.

"Sounds fairly exciting to listen to you," Southward said. "They bored me enough, Heaven knows. When a man takes his pen in hand—all except one who never punctuated from beginning to end. That was so entertaining that I was strongly tempted not to throw him down."

Hester paid no attention. She read on, absorbed. Suddenly she laughed again. "Oh, you wicked——"

"No lady-of-kingdoms stuff!" Southward ordered.

Hester was only half listening. There came another interval of reading. "Oh, the idiot!"

"Now you're talking!" Southward interpolated lazily. "Who could blame me?"

"Would you think that——" Hester ejaculated. "What a ridiculous—— A man's an awful fool to——" A long pause. "Isn't it?" This absently.

"Guess so," agreed Southward.

There came another interval of reading. Southward still smoked.

"Good gracious, Southward!" Hester said suddenly. She sat bolt upright. "This man is threatening to kill you."

"Gee!" Southward exclaimed. For an instant a faint embarrassment filmed the chiselled incisiveness of her look. "I thought I'd destroyed that. He was——"

"I know—that was why you got the revolver."

"Correct!" assented Southward. She too sat bolt upright. The embarrassed look went out of her face—it became keen, humorous.

"Yes, he told me if I wouldn't marry him he'd shoot me."

"What did you say to him?" Hester asked breathlessly.

"I said, 'Shoot and be damned!'"

"Were you afraid?"

"Well, I bought the revolver. Lysander got it for me and taught me how to use it. I practised with it every minute that I could until I was a dead shot. Hester, for one year I went everywhere in this town—*armed*."

"Good Lord! You—— How'd you carry it?"

"I fixed up a holster inside my shirt-waist. You know how they used to pouch just above the waist. I never went anywhere without it."

"My goodness, Southward!" Hester said, "if I'd suspected that—— It is rather thrilling, though. Weren't you frightened to death?"

"Well, at first. I had always believed that most people didn't mean it when they threatened to kill—but he was a different kind

of person. He'd have done it as quick as a flash, I think, if he could have made up his mind. But he couldn't make up his mind. The queer part of it was that, although he hated me, he still loved me. He couldn't pull the trigger. Then again, another thing helped me. After my first fear died down—and I was frightened to death at first, I'll admit that—and after the thrill died down—and it was thrilling in a way, I'll admit that also—the situation actually bored me. I told him that once, and I expected he'd shoot me, but he didn't. Sometimes I think that was what cured him. But——" Southward added a little inconsequently, "I've always kept the gun. I never go anywhere without it. I took it to Oldtown."

Hester went back to the letters. But her interest obviously began to diminish. Finally she dropped a long scrawled sheet. "I guess," she concluded, "the flavour soon dies out of a correspondence addressed to another woman." With a decided movement, she stacked the letters, snapped the elastic bands about them, replaced them in the box. "Life is a curious thing, isn't it?" she said thoughtfully. "Here we are, you and I, two girls of the same generation, brought up in the same environment, meeting the same people, subject to the same influences and with more than the usual congeniality of temperament. No man ever meets you without being immediately attracted to you—not always of course with the feeling of a lover but always with interest. Men see you the moment you come on the scene. You leap out of the landscape into their vision. At twenty-five you've had half a dozen proposals of marriage and many flirtations which might have run into marriage. At twenty-eight, I not only have never had a proposal, but I have never had a flirtation or anything remotely resembling it. Not only that, but men actually don't see me when they look at me. It is as though I were walking through life without a face. It isn't a matter that's breaking my heart of course. For you know I've never been crazy about men. They frighten me. But it does interest me to find out the reason why. How do you account for it, Southward?"

Southward lighted a third cigarette. "Your mother's been quarrelling with you," was all she said.

Hester did not speak.

"Was it very bad?" Southward went on.

Hester suddenly drew her hands from the back of her neck forward over her face. She talked in a muffled tone through them. "It was pretty bad," she admitted.

"Who started it?"

"I don't know exactly. I think probably Flora stirred her up yesterday—not intentionally of course. Flora has always fascinated her. You know Flora's soft placidity."

"Sure!" Southward answered. "I know. Cow! Go on!"

"Flora's a nice girl," Hester said stanchly. "I'm not knocking Flora. She's not original, perhaps, but all there. Well, she talked about her engagement of course, and all the gifts King Curtis's people had sent her. And it maddened mother. Mother was handsome when she was a girl, you know. She's handsome now for that matter. And then Bee—— Mother always had plenty of attention. She looks upon attention from men as a sort of sterling mark that proves ladyhood. She seems to think the fact that I've never had any attention not only reflects on me but in some unaccountable way on her. Now in point of fact——" Here Hester smiled with a real mirth. "I honestly don't mind a bit myself. I don't miss the attentions of men. Men, or at least young men, don't interest me particularly. And so when mother tells me that the reason men don't like me is that I'm homely and no style and uninteresting—'a bump on a log' is her favourite expression—it really doesn't hurt me as much as she thinks. But last night, she got on a new strain; she reproached me because she was never going to have any grandchildren. Now she never gets a rise out of me on the question of lovers, although I would like to think that for her sake I had refused one or two. But when she struck the maternity question, she hit the raw end of a nerve."

"What do you mean?" Southward asked directly.

"Well, I'll tell you." Hester's long slim hands were now clasped on the top of her head. Her eyes fixed themselves on a distance that stretched leagues beyond the walls of the garret. "I guess I'm the maternal type. I'm a breeder instinctively. I do love children. I would love to have a family—a big one. That's the only purpose matrimony serves in my eyes." She paused. "I know you hate the thought of marriage, yourself, Southward, but don't you want to have children sometime?"

Southward answered immediately and emphatically "No! No, again and again no. You see I look on that proposition this way. Any old female can be a mother and almost any old female is. I think I can do something better. I don't know what it is yet. I haven't had a chance to find out. But I consider that I'd be wasted at the maternity job. I'm too good for it. And besides look what it does to women, look at the Shayneford girls of our

age who've married and had a family. Then, although children amuse me, I don't care for them particularly. And I hate babies. Don't you, Hester?"

"I adore babies," Hester answered simply. "I worship them. I cannot hear of the birth of a baby to any woman, even Bert Beebee, without a pang of envy. I cannot take a baby into my arms without experiencing a sensation that's positively heavenly, a gush of love and tenderness and protection—you know what I mean." She paused and looked inquiringly at Southward.

No answering gleam lighted Southward's face. She shook her head finally. "No, there's no use pretending. I don't get you."

"I love children," Hester went on. "I love all children. I don't recognise any artificial differences. Of course I'm susceptible at times to the irritations of having them about—but not so susceptible, it seems to me, as most mothers that I know."

"That's because you don't have to have them about," Southward conjectured shrewdly.

"That's what some mothers tell me," Hester admitted. "I'd like to have the chance to prove it though. But it doesn't make any difference to me whether they're clean or dirty, sick or well, pretty or homely, good or bad. I love them—that's all there is to it. And yet I suppose I shall never have a child." Hester said this last in a musing tone as though she had forgotten Southward's presence. "I don't suppose I shall ever get a chance to marry, even if it were one that I could accept." She paused.

"Pretty tough!" dropped from Southward involuntarily.

"I suppose numberless women have married just anybody," Hester mused further, "and put up with loathsome companionship for the sake of maternity. It seems so strange that the birth of children should depend on so many accidental things. It seems that wanting children should be, after health, the first qualification for motherhood. But I suppose that nature has a purpose, that she planned it out ages ago, that everything that seems fortuitous is really the result of a wonderful deep-lying, far-reaching system. But it is a puzzle. Take me for instance. I'm as good a human being surely as Flora Tubman. Certainly I am as healthy, more intelligent, though certainly not so pretty and perhaps not so good. Yet nature selects her to carry on the race. I wonder in what way that I myself don't realise that I'm unfit."

"Oh, rot!" Southward interposed vigorously. "The answer is that you're too fine and too lovely and too clever for the gang of bone-heads that you've always known. If you could meet your kind of man, he'd be crazy about you."

Hester smiled indulgently, as though at the outburst of a child. "Southward," she asked, sobering abruptly, "do you really despise men? You're always saying you do. But do you?"

Southward's frown drew her straight brows into a perplexed tangle.

"I do and I don't," she said. "I like their companionship for out-of-door things and I like their talk—if they don't get mushy. I like the masculine point of view. Sometimes I feel that intellectually the masculine point of view is necessary to me. And yet—— It's queer when I think of it. Everybody says I'm heartless. I don't believe I am so dreadfully heartless. I'm awfully tender of old people and animals and some women and almost anybody that's sick or in trouble, but I have no mercy whatever as far as men are concerned. I like some of them—Lysander for instance—but as for men in general, yes, I guess I do despise them." The perplexed frown disappeared in the predatory look which, increased by some sinister emotion, suddenly made a volcano of her smooth young face. "When I think of Charlotte——"

"Yes, I hate them too when I think of Charlotte." Hester's face changed too—but it grew tragic, not fierce.

"When I consider what a price she's paid for—— You know, Hester, I was sixteen when I first heard Charlotte's story. It made a terrible impression on me. I did really hate men for a long time. I made a vow to myself to break as many hearts as I could. Of course I outgrew that idea, but the feeling has never died down—that sense of injustice. I suppose that's one reason why I justified myself in flirting the way I do. I feel that no matter what I do, they've done much worse and done it as a matter of course and never questioned their right. Yes, Charlotte's experience certainly made a difference in my life. For one thing I feel that she's my responsibility as long as I live. For a long time that revelation made the thought of marriage utterly impossible. But of course that isn't my objection to marriage now. It is that it's such a confining institution for women and——"

"Southward," Hester interrupted suddenly, "I'd like to ask you something. Do you ever look the facts of nature in the face? When you think of a future husband, do you see a definite figure—what people call an ideal? I mean do you think of him primarily as a person you have chosen for companionship, or do you think of him primarily only in reference to the marriage relation, or

do you think of him primarily as a fitting person to beget your children? I mean——”

Abruptly she stopped; for flame, flickering from pink to scarlet, was beating in successive waves over Southward's face. Suddenly Hester blushed too, a thick deep unbecoming flood of crimson. For an instant the two girls stared at each other aghast. For an instant, half-terrified, half-fascinated, they hung over that mysterious abyss which in conversation they had never crossed. Then as, with one accord, they drew back.

“I never think of marriage except as the basis for a pleasant companionship, Hester,” Southward said. “I never consider the matter of children. I never consider the matter of the married relation. To me marriage means merely the provision of a good comrade for the game of life. But even then it isn't necessary to my scheme of things. I'm just as well off without it. Whatever it is—that feeling with which men inflame women so that they must marry—whatever it is, I never have it. I'm immune. And I'm glad of it. You see,” she smiled a little, “I'm always too interested in the next man to think of marriage. Men appeal to me only on the score of novelty.”

“Marriage to me,” Hester explained, “means only a family. I'd want to respect my husband; but I *can* live without love, romance, companionship. I do want a family though. I cannot bear to think——” She smiled, though palpably with an effort. “But I wish I could go to a beauty-doctor and be made lovely for mother's sake. And then if I could gather in one little scalp, not for my belt but for hers, it would make for considerable domestic felicity in our wigwam. I pity mother so much when she deplores my lack of looks that I find myself wondering if something couldn't be done about it.”

Hester arose as she spoke and moved over to the mirror. Southward left the couch and joined her. The two girls stood surveying their reflections there, Hester soberly, Southward as though from a new point of view.

Hester was taller than Southward, and she was more slender. But her slenderness was not really slimness; it was thinness, gauntness. She was blondish. Her face was without colour—sallow and freckled. Neither life nor light sparkled in her expression. Frequently her gaze lost itself in apathy. She hesitated when she talked, and her walk showed a certain ungraceful unsteadiness. In every possible way she lacked authority. She was not without her good points. Her features were the kind on which personal charm could have written much. Her teeth were

white and regular, her hands slim and shapely. And her hair gave her a definite point of beauty. It was not so much hair as flame, not so much flame as blaze. It arose from her head with a singular virility, every hair in rebellion against every other hair, swept like a conflagration from brow to neck.

Yet these points palliated little. You could not look at Hester without a feeling of dissatisfaction as with an incomplete thing. Physically, she made a few promises, but her personality redeemed none of them. She was blank.

In contrast, Southward's crisp slimness seemed to take on another element of completeness and compactness; her chiselled clean-cutness another degree of regularity and virility; her brunette colouring to run more emphasisingly to high lights and definite tints. Almost every quality of her figure was boyish. It had a boy's slimness of height, a boy's flatness of width. Its lines were all straight, though springing with life. The breasts alone stirred her waist into faint soft curves. Almost every quality of her face was boyish. It had a boy's squareness of shape, a boy's frankness of expression. Her hair, thick, straight, sleek, ran down into a peak of her forehead and then turning into flat massive bands at her ears, clung so close that it seemed short. It made her head look like a boy's head. Her eyes, melted jet poured into silver, showed through underlying blue gleams a boy's calmness and clarity of gaze. When she thought hard, her brows that were ordinarily arches of perfect beauty drew straight and merged with a vertical frown that held a boy's irritated perplexity. In any consideration of Southward's face, you must come again and again to her lips. For just as the faint curve of her breasts gave her figure its only air of the maiden, her lips gave her face its single touch of the woman; they were softly turned but full, the colour of raspberries and the texture of pearl.

Hard Southward was with the hardness of youth, and proud with the pride of personality. And yet you could not look at her without that faint inward stir which leads to a delicious sadness. In the directness of her eyes was the eternal enigma of virginity. An accidental combination—a quality of piquancy plus some subtlety of irregularity—united with it to make poignancy. It was a *beauté du diable* raised to the nth power.

Hester, her eyes going swiftly from her own face to Southward's, voiced that. Her expression of weariness died; a look of intense admiration warmed in its place. "Oh, Southward!" she exclaimed, "how I do love to look at you! There has never been

a moment since I've known you that I haven't enjoyed your face."

Southward examined her own reflection critically. "I'm lop-eyed," she said dispassionately. "And one side of my nose isn't like the other. If I could get those two things fixed up, I'd qualify. But Hester—about you—I—I—well, I don't know how to say it exactly. I'm not trying to make out that you're a beauty. But I do say that there are times when you're talking and you're awfully interested in what you're saying that I love to look at you. I have a feeling that you're the kind of person that it makes all the difference in the world in her looks whether she's happy or not. Not that," she suddenly became ferocious, "you couldn't improve yourself a whale of a lot by taking some interest in your personal appearance. You never get the right clothes as I've a million times told you. And your hair always looks like the devil. But when you're happy——"

"Oh, I'm happy all the time," Hester insisted, "except when I worry mother. Now let's talk about something else."

CHAPTER IV

"I'll walk a piece with you," Southward said as Hester started to go. "Wait till I get my torch."

"I guess I'll wear this coat home, Southward," Hester asserted absently, "it's come up so cool."

"All right," answered Southward. She did not remove her own coat, and thus habited the girls crept down the stairs.

"Where be you-two a-going?" Mrs. Drake called from the ell as they tiptoed through the house.

"I'm going just a little way with Hester, grandmother," Southward replied. And, "Good night, Mrs. Drake," Hester called.

"Good night, Hester," Mrs. Drake answered. "Remember me to your mother. Hadn't you better put something on over your shoulders?"

"We've got something, grandmother," Southward assured her.

The girls passed out through the front door. Hester pressed the button of her electric torch. They walked between shoulder-high box-hedges over a sloping broad flagged walk until they came to a wide wooden gate, dividing, exactly in the middle, a white wooden fence.

It was a moonlight night, still and a little cool. A few big clouds clung to the sky. As the girls emerged, the moon dropped in behind one of them. The sky immediately became a deep sea covered with islands. Shoals of stars littered the black currents between these islands; the sky seemed to sag with their weight, to flatten from its high arch. But somewhere near was a real sea. In the air lay its smell, a faint reverberance of its roar.

"Southward," Hester said, holding the gate open and peering back into the gloom, "do you ever stop to think what a beautiful place Long Lanes is and what a romantic place? Every time I come here nowadays—especially at night—I am more strongly impressed with it."

Southward turned too.

The big house existed in that light only as a faint glimmer. The white gate patched the darkness with a definite rectangle of silver, and the white fence, which surrounded the formal garden, seemed to put parallel streaks of phosphorescence across the sur-

rounding blackness. Within the enclosure, everything was sharply defined, black—the round thick cushions of the high box-hedges, the symmetrical triangles of the low trees. At one side, beyond the fence, stretched an orchard—a bank of soft, unshaped gloom. At the other side, also outside the enclosure, lay a garden. There, irregular splashes of white competed with the starlight; but mainly its colour was lost; the garden existed only by means of its perfume. All these however were but assisting detail; the house dominated the scene. It maintained a presence, unseen but majestic, unprofaned by the woods that swept up to it on all four sides. Indeed, it was more as though the serried trees were carefully guarding, were jealously concealing, this product of race and caste.

“Oh, yes, it’s beautiful enough on the outside, I suppose,” Southward said. “The trouble with me is I can’t see it. I was brought up with it, and then of course so many of these beautiful old houses are the tombs of so much youth and ambition, as this is of mine, that sometimes I wish they could all be burned.” Her voice was fierce for an instant. “Of course,” she veered, “if I could clear out all grandmother’s truck and restore the old furniture to its place, it would be wonderful. Why, Hester, let me take you sometime into the upstairs rooms. They’re jammed full of old stuff; high-boys, low-boys, couches, secretaries, chairs—God only knows what. I could make that house a marvel if I only had a chance—and provided I was interested enough to do it.”

“Well, of course you’ll have the chance sometime,” Hester said comfortingly. “It’s a lovely night to-night, isn’t it?” she continued, a faint note of exhilaration in her voice. “I do love a starry night. Everybody else prefers the moonlight, but I don’t. I never have.”

“Oh, I think a moon is great,” Southward protested.

“I don’t. It seems tawdry to me. And the theatre imitates it so well. There’s a quality about the starlight that you can’t imitate. But then I love the stars. You remember, in High, astronomy was always my favourite science.”

“I liked astronomy,” Southward said, “but only because it was a snap. I guess I liked physics and chemistry and mathematics much better. Astronomy doesn’t get you anywhere. There’s nothing *into* it. And as for the stars—they’re always the same.”

“I don’t think so,” Hester disagreed emphatically. “It seems to me that the quality of the starlight varies not only with the

weather but with the season. Winter starlight is certainly different from summer starlight and fall from spring."

"Well, of course," Southward agreed indifferently, "I suppose atmospheric conditions would make a difference. Only I never noticed it."

"Miss Avery told me," Hester went on dreamily, "that a person didn't know what stars were like until he'd lived in the desert. I think it would be wonderful too, as you sail around the world, to watch the procession of the constellations. I am so fond of the stars that I should want to sleep on deck on an ocean voyage. I hope I'll see the Southern Cross sometime."

"Well, Hetter," Southward suggested briskly, "let's beat it round the world as soon as our responsibilities are over. I think we could rake and scrape enough between us in ten years to do that. Then on our way through the Mediterranean, we'll go down into the Sahara desert and camp out."

Hester laughed. "All right. Southward, if you were perfectly free what would you do? What do you consider the ideal life?"

"Travel," Southward answered promptly. "Travel all the time. I want to see the top and bottom and both sides of this old world. Besides I like the kind of social contact you get in travel. You meet people one day and lose them the next—there are no ties of any description. My idea of perfect happiness would be to join an exploring expedition. I don't care whether it's into the Tropics or the Arctics. I'm so strong and practical and athletic. I stand the extremes of weather so well. I'm pretty sure I'd be as game as most men. Lady Burton's life is just the kind of life I'd like to lead. Or, perhaps sometime after I'm old and all the ginger's gone out of me, I might settle down—and even marry. But not until there's nothing left. And I'd like to go not only to all the big show-places but to a lot of little hole-in-the-corner places. Wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes," Hester answered immediately. "Of course I would. Who wouldn't—for that matter? And who could have lived the life that you and I live in Shayneford without wanting to go? That's the great bond between you and me—our discontent with our environment. And yet, travelling wouldn't entirely satisfy me. I don't know exactly what it is I want. I haven't found out yet. It's more——" She did not finish.

The two girls had in the meantime turned into one of the two long lanes that gave the Drake place its name. They led in opposite directions, the one to the main-travelled road, the other

to the "lower road." The lane was of uniform width but deeply-rutted. And although they walked in the hemisphere of light cast by Hester's torch, they stumbled at times. For long spaces, the road spanned by bushes was open to the sky. These were succeeded by tunnels made by arching and intertwining trees. After ten minutes or more, they turned into the "lower road." Walking was easier now; for there were sidewalks although they were but grass-bordered continuations of the street. At intervals the dim white bulks or the dimmer black bulks of houses, cut by golden window-lights, began to loom out of the dark. These phantom cubes were preceded always by the smell of flowers and of box.

"There's a light in Gert's room," Southward said. "Let's go in."

"I'd love to," Hester answered. "But what time was it when we left?"

"A little before nine."

"All right."

They crossed the street, turned into a path that led to a low, dark, gambrel-roofed house. Southward knocked with a vigorous rat-a-tat-tat.

A woman opened the door, peered near-sightedly up at them.

"Hullo, Libbie. It's only us," Southward explained.

"Oh, it's you, Southward," the woman answered in a quick brisk tone. "Come right in. Oh, hullo, Hester. Gertie'll be tickled to death."

"We saw a light in Gert's window," Southward explained, "and we thought perhaps we could see her for a while. Is she sitting up?"

"Land, yes," Libbie said with delight. "Wait till I git the lamp. Mind that top step. The baby's nursing. Stronger nor a little ox and hungrier nor a little bear. I never see anything like it."

"I saw Sue-Salome, this afternoon," Southward remarked. "Don't you miss her?"

"I should say I *did*," answered Sue-Salome's sister. "But I see her once every day and sometimes twice. She most gen'ally drops in here in the afternoon and sometimes I go home for a spell in the evening soon's Mr. Beebee's had his supper."

The girls followed her up a narrow flight which led directly from the little box-like hall. In the front room, a big girl in a long pink kimono sat in a Boston rocker near the window. Two long thick braids of hair pulled forward over her shoulders,

and between their ends a baby tugged as though famished at a round white, milk-swelled breast.

"Hullo, Southward!" the girl called, craning vigorously round at them. "Hullo, Hester! Sit down! Glad to see you!" Unabashed, she looked her callers straight in the eye.

"Gracious! what a big brat, Gert!" Southward commented serenely. "Greedy's his middle name, isn't it?"

"Eats like a I-don't-know-what," Gert Beebee said proudly.

"Ain't he a handsome child?" Libbie Hatch demanded exultantly.

Libbie Hatch was very like her sister Sue-Salome. Only while Sue-Salome was little and slim and brisk, she was little and fat and brisk. She had a round butter-ball of a face, lighted by quick, dark, brilliant eyes. What in Sue-Salome seemed an unappeasable joy in life took the form in Libbie of an unappeasable curiosity about it. Libbie always wore earrings, hanging arrangements of minute diamonds. She wore them now with her neat print gown.

The twinkling drops seemed to point the sparkle in her face.

Now she bent over the child and whispered baby-talk. He dropped the nipple and seemed to stare an instant at the glitter on her ear-lobe.

"See that?" Gert asked serenely, "ain't much gets by him!"

Except for a slight refining pallor, Gert Beebee showed no traces of her recent maternity. She was pretty, a rustic, almost a peasant type—blonde. Her yellow hair had a beautiful natural roll. Her eyes showed a clear child-like blue. Her face was very irregular. When she smiled her lids came together; her mirth seemed to take tiny wrinkly tucks in her skin. She would have been a little simian if an occasional piquancy of contour had not redeemed her. And there was a frank, clean fleshliness about her that her good-humoured look made pleasing.

"I bought two little dresses for the baby in Oldtown, Gert," Southward said. "I would have brought them along if I had had any idea we were going to stop in. It was seeing the light in your window put the idea into our heads."

"And I've made two little bonnets," Hester murmured. "I'll bring them round to-morrow."

Gertie looked delighted. She murmured enthusiastic thanks.

"Look at that place on the top of his head beating up and down," Southward interrupted them. "Makes me nervous to watch it—it always does. You seem to know just how to hold him, Gert."

"Sure!" Gert said in a superior tone. "It comes to you. There! See! He's had enough. And about time." The little bundle of flesh, apparently gorged, dropped from feeding to immediate sleep.

"You remember that little kitty—the one those old maids the Emertons left here?" Hester asked suddenly, "Tabby, they called her?"

"Oh, yes, I remember," Gertie answered. "Awful little—black with white spots under her chin. She was Mis' Wallis' cat Bunchy's kitten. Bunchy always had nice kittens."

"Well, she came into our house this morning," Hester went on, "acting the queerest way—so troubled and unhappy and uncertain—why her face was almost human in its expression of worry. She went all over the house from cellar to attic and all the time making the strangest little noises. I kept taking her up and petting her. Mother kept telling me that she'd have her kittens in the house if I didn't take care. But I couldn't turn her out and finally I made a little box for her and put it in my closet. Then I forgot all about her. When I went up to my room after supper, there were four little kittens in the box beside her—the cunningest little things. She looked so different. You never saw a greater change in a *human* countenance. She was so serene and quiet. It was really wonderful, as though she hadn't a care for the future. She even purred when I took her kittens up."

"You *don't*," Gertie said, as though involuntarily. "It's wonderful though what you feel like. Why, the first three days after that baby was born, I didn't want to do a thing but just lay and look at it. I didn't mind what happened. It seemed as if everything was coming out all right. It seemed as if nothing could ever be wrong again. It seemed—it seemed——" she stopped as though she had reached the limit of her articulateness.

Hester looked at her intently. "Well, that's the way Tabby felt."

"Are you going to keep the kittens?" Gert asked.

"Oh, yes—that is, all that I can't give away. I couldn't drown them after the way Tabby trusted me."

"Save one for me, Hester," Gert said. "I'll be glad to have it."

Then as though the conversation had gone long enough from her offspring, she turned the little purple wrinkled face up to her visitors. "What do you think of that for a baby?" she demanded proudly.

"Don't ask me, Gert!" Southward made prompt reply. "I'm just like a man. They all look alike to me. I've never seen one

that I could call pretty yet. I will admit he looks husky though."

"Want to hold him?" Gertie asked hospitably.

"Land, no," Southward protested. "I'm scared to death of them."

"It's a beautiful baby, Gert," Hester said. Involuntarily her long arms reached over. Gertie lifted the child into them. Hester pulled him close.

"Look at her!" Gert smiled broadly. "Takes to it like a duck to water. I'd have thought she'd brought up a family."

"What are you going to christen him, Gert?" Southward asked idly.

"Maurice," Gertie answered. Her manner changed, became a little menacing. Then with emphasis. "*Maurice Beebee!*"

"Swell tag all right," Southward commented, still idly.

Gert did not answer. But her clear eyes had turned to pools of frost. She scowled. "Go on," she said contemptuously. "Take your turn. I s'pose that's what you came for. Try to get it out of me."

Southward came upright from the rocking-chair in which she had sprawled. Hester stopped her gentle rocking for a frozen instant; then she resumed it, her face crimson, her eyes on the baby's face.

"Gee, Gert," Southward made an explanation for both. "I thought you knew me better than that. Whatever I am, I'm not a sneak. And I've always played fair. I don't care who the kid's father is. It isn't any of my business. Hester feels the same way. We think it's up to you to tell or not to tell, just as you please. We called because we like you. We want to show you that we're not interfering or leaping to conclusions."

The scowl rolled off Gertie's forehead. A lush smile revealed a broad streak of white between her pink lips. "Well, excuse me!" she said heartily. "I hadn't d'oughter mistrusted you the way I did. But if you could hear what folks have said to me—I nearly told Sarah Wallis to get out of this house the other day. And I'll do it yet if she gives me any more lip. As if it was any of *her* funeral. I've had the child and I ain't shamed of it and I'm going to bring it up myself and, I ain't asking a bit of charity from anybody. Pa says I won't have to as long as he lives. He's crazy about the baby already."

"Good for you, Gert!" It was as though this came involuntarily from Southward and she smiled as though in temperamental sympathy with this declaration of independence. "That's just the attitude I'd take. But, Gert, don't misunderstand me. I'm

not judging you but I think you were an awful fool just the same."

"Well, in a way I suppose I was," Gertie said with an unexpected reasonableness. "And then again—— Say, I'm going to tell you girls something. And you can put it under your hat and keep it there—but it's on the level. The father of that baby doesn't live here—thank the Lord! He's big and strong and elegant-looking—not much like any of these pindling Shayneford men. He could lick three of them with one hand tied. If he should come into this room now, you'd envy me. This is what I want to say to you. I ain't pretending he was the first one, although I ain't so bad as a lot of folks in this town try to make out.

"But it was the first time I ever got this way. And I could have got out of it. Oh, I'm over seven all right and I know what girls do. And he said—and he offered—— But I wouldn't. I *couldn't*. I waited and waited and—— Oh, I went through enough. And a good many times I said to myself, 'I can't bring a baby that ain't got no father into the world. I've got to——' But after a while that child just seemed to be calling for his life inside me and I couldn't any more refuse it than I could have committed murder. I didn't find it so easy, believe me, but I'm glad now that I went through with it. It's a fine baby. The doctor says so. Everybody says so. There won't be any babies like it in this town for one while. Why I could have the pick of twenty men to be father to my kid." Her voice took a sudden turn, swelled from a broken dry emotional assurance to excitement and triumph. "You jess think how Flora Tubman looks down on me. And yet she's going to marry that mutt of a King Curtis. *King Curtis!* Why, I could have—— I'll tell you this; there's more than one girl in this town has taken my leavings. You can't make me think a pretty girl like Flora would have chosen him if she could have got somebody else. No, she took him because he's all there *was*. She'll have a family of children all right as fast as she can have them. And what will they look like? Thin, homely, white-livered kids! I'll match my baby with any two of them. Flora probably thinks—all the other girls in this town probably think—that I feel cheap and ashamed. Well, I don't. Not one bit of it. Especially when I heft my baby and see what a corker he is! I feel like *somebody*—that's the way I feel. And I ain't going to take any back talk from nobody. I don't have to."

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For a long time the two girls walked in silence.

"Goodness, what a strange confession!" Southward said at last. Her tone was almost awed.

"I should say it was," Hester agreed tremulously. "I feel—I feel—as if I'd been through something."

"But it's such an extraordinary state of mind," Southward went on. "One thing she said kept coming back to my mind all during that harangue: 'I feel as though I'd picked the father of my child. I took what I wanted.' Of all the girls in this town, Gert Beebee alone can pick the father of——" Southward burst into laughter. She shook convulsively. In the end she had to lean up against a fence. "Isn't that a scream when you think of it?"

"Don't let us think of it any more." Hester did not laugh. She still trembled. "I can't describe to you how it's upset me. To be so close to a thing like that. And then her pride in it. It seemed wicked; it seemed terrible—horrible——"

"All right," said Southward in her briskest and most business-like tone. "I won't say anything more about it. I'd like to see Gert's idea of an 'elegant-looking' man though. Brace up, Hetter. Oh, here we are at Matt's. Want to come in while I get a book?"

"I'd love to," Hester breathed in the tone of one with whom mental tension is relaxing.

They turned towards a white house, a little band-box of a building, set on a grassy terrace—a small place, bordered with a lilac-hedge. Up stone steps and over square stepping-stones sunk in the grass, they approached a vine-covered piazza. The windows were all long. Two of them gleamed softly. Southward tapped on the pane. In an instant, the white curtain flew up; a volume of golden light poured onto the piazza, outlining the figure of a man between the lace curtains. Immediately he swung open half the window, moved back. Southward and Hester stepped into the room.

"Good evening, Matthew," Southward said.

"Good evening," the man answered in a chirping voice. "Who is it? Oh, Southward and Hester."

"Are you at home?" Southward asked.

"It seems so. When did you get back, Southward? To what am I indebted?"

"This afternoon. I want another book." Southward answered both questions. "I feel as though I weren't going to sleep well to-night. Can I explore in the book-cases and see what I can get?"

"Certainly! Certainly!" Mr. Hallowell chirped. "Help yourself!" He seated himself at the table and took up his pen. But his eyes went from one girl to the other; he followed them each in turn with an amused speculative gaze. When he looked at Southward, his eyes filled with a half-fascinated, half-irritated admiration. When he looked at Hester, they were all pity.

He was an old man, little and chubby, age-bitten and frost-bitten, like a winter-bogle. His long hair might have been made of the stuff of winter clouds, it was, in fibre, so smooth and downy and yet, in mass, so solid and glittering. His eyes were as blue and clear as winter skies, his cheeks as rosy and shining as winter apples. He had a long upper lip and above it a nubbin of a nose lifted upright, presenting nostrils straightforward like the muzzle of a revolver. His look, even in old age, retained a quality of gaiety that was a part the result of the happy irregularity of his features and half a touch of real glee in his smile. He smiled now at intervals.

Southward moved along the line of book-cases on one side, Hester on the other.

It was a large room full of the character given by a cleanly, systematic disorder. Book-cases lined the walls three-quarters of the way up. They were crowded so tightly that extracting a book was a difficult proceeding. Even then, they had begun to overrun the shelves into the room—to pile in tottering columns in the corner, under the table, beside the couch. Italian, Spanish, French, all about lay magazines highly-coloured, cheaply-printed, every one with a scene of violence on the covers. Above the line of the book-shelves were pictures and bric-à-brac, the endearing haphazard memorabilia of the European trips of two generations ago; steel-engravings of foreign scenes framed in faded gold; decorative litter in alabaster and Italian marble, wood-carvings, mosaics, a pair of Roman lamps. The big central-table foamed with papers; these had burst over onto a small colony of tables that surrounded it. Indeed, when he wrote, Mr. Hallowell sat in the midst of an archipelago of tables. The investigations of the two girls finally brought them back to the table. The light of the green-shaded reading-lamp enveloped them.

Mr. Hallowell's eyebrows flew up suddenly.

"What have we here?" he chirped. "Two Chinese princes?"

"Oh, I'd forgotten." Southward looked down on her exotic attire. "I guess I've never told you about these Chinese coats. I found oodles of them when I cleaned the attic up. Say, Matt, why haven't you ever come to call on us? Don't you realise that

this invitation is an honour? Nobody's ever seen this garret since we fixed it up but Hester and me."

"Perhaps I'll come sometime," Mr. Hallowell said, "when I'm not so busy."

"See that you do!" Southward ordered. "How's *The Rebellions of the Nineteenth Century* getting on?"

"Pretty well," Mr. Hallowell answered. "But it's slow work at best. How'd you like Herrick?"

"Oh, great!" Southward replied with enthusiasm. "That's something for me to say too, for as a rule I don't like love-songs. I must say though he gets away with it in great style. There's nothing sweetie about him. I suppose one reason is that there are so many Julias and Altheas that he never gets the chance to grow really mushy. Perhaps that's why I liked him—fellow-feeling."

Mr. Hallowell smiled appreciatively. "What do you want next?" he asked. "Why don't you-girls read something serious together, Karl Marx for instance? I'll give you a whole list of books when you've finished with him."

Southward shook her head. "Not for mine," she said. "Too much like work. Hester might."

Hallowell turned to Hester. "Why don't you, Hester?" he asked.

"I will," Hester answered. "I don't think that sort of stuff does me any good though. I'm always interested," she went on vaguely, "and yet it doesn't get me anywhere. It's so faraway; it doesn't touch me at any point. I'm not the person for it. I can't connect it with living. I'd like to make things better in the world if I could. But I can't see how it's to be done. And I'm too scared. Now Southward isn't scared at all, but she doesn't care."

"No," said Southwell, "I don't. Like Marjorie Fleming—not a single damn, Matt. I confess I'm interested only to make things better for S. Drake, meaning me. I've wasted twenty-five years of my life already—but I intend to get all that's coming to me from now on."

Mr. Hallowell had been looking from one to the other of the two girls.

"Waste women!" he commented suddenly. Then after a pause. "Well, you'll explode sometime."

"I shan't," Hester said in an intense tone. "I haven't the courage of a fly. But I'm always thrilled by rebellion in others."

Mr. Hallowell smiled gleefully. He rubbed his hands together.

"Then this is the best period in the world's history for you to live, Hester. For everybody's rebelling. We've had almost every kind of trouble. The workers of the world, both men and women, are rebelling as *workers*; men are rebelling as *men*; women are rebelling as *women*. We haven't had a children's rebellion yet, to be sure; but I wouldn't be surprised if it came. There was a Children's Crusade once, you know. You'll explode into rebellion some day, both of you."

"If Southward and I could be boiled down and concentrated into one woman, we'd make a splendid rebel," Hester explained, "for Southward's all action without theory and I'm all theory without action. But as we are now, Southward's action has nothing altruistic about it and my altruism has nothing practical."

"Waste women," Mr. Hallowell commented again. This time his clear eyes turned sombre. He rubbed his hands together, but slowly.

"Well," Southward yawned, "this bores me. Any new books, Matt? I mean travel or expedition?"

"No, but I'm expecting some this week."

"I guess I'll have to take Dickens then," Southward decided. "It's about time I read him all over again. Don't bother, Matt. I know where he is." She walked to one of the book-cases, ran her finger along a line of old-fashioned, dingy-looking novels, pulled one out with a decided jerk. She opened it, ruffled the pages. "Oh, how I do adore Sairy Gamp!" she commented. "I eat her up." She sped rapidly through a paragraph. Then with her hand clutching the book, she fell into reverie.

Mr. Hallowell craned his neck to look after her. His eyes held many expressions—wonder, interest, perplexity—irritation even—but they were all fused by fascination. Southward stood still, her eyes fixed on the distance. But now she was humming lightly. A shimmer as of melted silver had come into her eyes. Between the raspberry-red of her lips appeared just a blue-pearl suggestion of her teeth.

Mr. Hallowell's perplexity broke into frank amusement. "What are you up to, Southward?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing," Southward answered. But now she was definitely smiling. Her look was that of one who is decidedly "up" to something. "I've only got to make a conquest of four men—that's all, Matt—new ones to boot—just arrived."

Mr. Hallowell smiled appreciatively. "Poor devils!"

"But remember, Matt," Southward said, "you're the one I really love."

Mr. Hallowell smiled again.

"Well, I must be going," said Hester.

"And I," echoed Southward. "I expect I'll be in every night to see you until those books arrive, Matt."

"All right," said Mr. Hallowell. "Come as often as you want." He took up his pen. Before the girls had disappeared through the window, he had gone deep into his work.

"Come over to-morrow night, Hetter," Southward said, outside.

"Yes—about seven as usual."

"And don't worry about what your mother says. It's not worth worrying about."

"No, I won't worry. It doesn't bother me really. I had forgotten it."

"To-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow."

Partway up the road, Southward turned suddenly, flashed her light back of her. A thickening bulk drew from out of the shadow, became human, and hurried to her side.

"I *thought* it was you, Lysander," Southward said.

The young man who struck into the radius of her torch was a typical rural product; but he was none the less a vigorous and picturesque specimen. His blue flannel shirt set off a splendid pair of shoulders, his long tight-fitting black-leather boots a fine pair of legs. A well-shaped head topped his tall erect strong-looking figure. The innocuous regularity of his features broke in a peculiarly winning smile. He was blond and profusely freckled; the blue of his eyes as clear, the pink of his cheeks as pure, the white of his teeth as milky as country air and fare could make them. His thick-curling hair, parted at one side, carefully roached, and imprinting a perfect arc of gold on his shaven neck, must have been the pride of the Shayneford barber.

"Where are you going, Southward?" he asked.

"Home. Hester came over to-night. Then I walked a piece with her. What time is it?"

"Not so very late. A little after ten. Heard about those city folks over to Long Pond?"

"Yes, grandfather told me about them to-night. Who are they and what do they do? Do you like them?"

"Yes—first-class. They seem like regular guys. Joshing all day long. Half the time you can't tell what they do mean from what they don't mean. Cameron, he's a newspaper-man. O'Reilly travels and writes books. Fearing is a sort of sky-pilot—lectures.

That other fellow, Smith—I don't exactly know what he does—works for a living, I guess."

Southward smiled her appreciation of this sarcasm. "Well, I suppose I'll meet them all in the course of time."

"Oh, yes, by another week they'll all be running after you." A sullen note forced itself into Lysander's voice.

Southward ignored it. "How long are they going to be here?"

"Oh, a month or six weeks. They didn't seem quite sure themselves."

A silence fell. Southward walked along, swinging her light absently, cutting strange geometric patterns on the road and on the bushes. Lysander watched her.

"Southward," Lysander said after a while, "I've made up my mind to one thing to-night. I'm going to ask you to marry me and when you give me your answer, it's final. See? I'm not going to ask you again."

"All my answers have been final, Lysander," Southward said with an uncharacteristic gentleness but her usual directness. "So don't ask me now. You know I like you, Ly. I like you better than any man in Shayneford. I'd rather go off with you for a ride, or a tramp or swimming or fishing than anybody I can think of. But I don't love you. And I can't marry you."

They had come to the point where the road turned into the North Lane.

Southward halted.

"That's final," Lysander said. "Remember, I'll never ask you again."

"Yes, it's final," Southward reiterated firmly.

"I'll walk to the house with you," Lysander remarked.

"No, thanks. I prefer to be alone. Good night."

"Night," Lysander echoed. He did not move, but he spat meditatively. He stood there until Southward's quick retreating footsteps died in the distance.

CHAPTER V

LONG LANES presented a front of an unameliorated gloom as Southward approached. But when she opened the door, a gleam of light shot from the left. Simultaneously, "That you, Southward?" came her grandmother's voice.

"Yes, grandmother."

"Did you go way home with Hester?"

"No, only as far as Mr. Hallowell's. I stopped in there and got a book."

"What d'he have to offer?"

"Nothing—much, grandmother."

"Be you going to read all night long? You'll git awful homely if you lose all your beauty sleep every night the way you do."

"No, I won't read long. In fact, I think I'll go in swimming instead. That breeze has died down and it's awfully hot and sticky. I don't feel like going to bed."

"Nor me. There ain't a drop of sleep in my body."

"Can I do anything for you, grandmother?"

"No." Mrs. Drake admitted it reluctantly. "Charlotte, she jess give me a good rubbing. Mis' Ellis came this evening while you was out. She brought the *Westbury Citizen* over. I've been a-reading it." Mrs. Drake went on at a galloping rate, as though she had been waiting for just this opportunity for mental exercise. "Old Mis' Bassett of Westbury Centre is dead and them Cahoons, you know that awful shiftless lot, lost their youngest child. Mumps—warn't that terrible? Caught cold—my sister Sabry allus said it was terrible to ketch cold if you had the mumps. Mis' Ellis told me about it—head swelled up like a bucket. She said it was the worse-looking corpse for a child she ever see. And that Nye fellow—that peakid-looking, light-complected one, he's dead. I ain't read so much news in a year and I ain't got through all the paper yet. I allus reads the deaths first. I enjoy them the most."

Southward leaned against the door and shook silently. "Yes, grandmother," she said in muffled tones.

"I'm going to read the rest of it to-morrow night. I presume I can go to sleep now. You be keerful about swimming too far out—won't you, Southward?"

"Yes, grandmother."

"I declare I don't understand how you can go into the water at night. I'd be scared half out of my senses."

"If you could swim the way I can, you wouldn't mind," Southward explained.

"My sister Sabry told me of a case of a man who went in bathing one night just back of their house. They all sat on the back porch and watched him. He was swimming all right but suddenly up went his hands and down went his head. Well, sir, before they could get to him, he was dead—whether it was heart-disease or cramp nobody never knew. But they rolled him over a barrel for hours. It don't take long to drown."

"I know, grandmother, but I'm always very careful and I never had cramp in my life. Good night."

"Good night."

But Southward did not go in swimming immediately. She moved about the garret, removing the wine-glasses and cigarettes, putting books back, straightening the magazines and piling up papers. She worked more as one under the urge of action than the necessity of neatness, and her eyes were preoccupied. But her reflections were obviously pleasurable; she hummed without cessation; and occasionally, she made a little dancing *pas seul*. After a while, she undressed, drew on her bathing-suit. One piece and virtually sleeveless, it was black, close-fitting, cut round and low in the neck, ending in knee tights and a short, scant black skirt. She pulled a rubber-cap close over her head, tucked all her hair under it. Then she stole quietly downstairs.

There was no light now in her grandmother's room. From three directions came soporific murmurings. Southward crept silently into the kitchen and out the back way. A little path ran straight from the door, through the grape-arbour, past the orchard to the pond. There the water lapped and rippled on a tiny sandy beech.

The moon had come out. But a surge of cloud had swept over it, veiling it in heavy muffling folds; stars, sprinkled thickly, floated over the rest of the sky. Except for a long smeared reflection here and there, the pond lay dim, vague, mysterious. Near, the pines seemed to be crowding close down to the water's edge, as though jealously preserving its mystery; some had waded in, were standing knee-deep. Far away, the outlines of the pond were lost; it stretched on illimitably, apparently bounded only by the confines of space.

Southward stood a moment looking about her. She still hummed,

and her eyes still smiled. Then she ran down the frail, slanting, wooden platform that projected into the water, and with a sudden lithe fling of her supple body, went overboard. Her dive made so clean a hole in the pond that it was accompanied by almost no splash; it was more as though the surface opened for her. She swam for an interval under water, came up gasping. She made back rapidly to the pier, held herself there with one arm. With the other she pulled the rubber-cap off and tossed it onto the boards. The mass of her hair had survived the plunge unwet; about her brow it glittered dimly. The rest had been plastered to her head in an odd boyish flatness.

With long leisurely strokes, she made toward the centre of the pond. The moon was still fighting its way over the rampart of cloud. Beyond lay a sea of sky, clear, black, loaded with stars. Suddenly the moon emerged, dragging wisps of vapour torn away in its struggle with the clouds, plunged serenely into this jet-black sea. It was as though the moon exploded. Many of the stars went out like blown candles. That jet-black sea became a blue ocean, brilliantly illuminate. The moon came to the surface. One by one the wefts of cloud dropped away. It sailed stately, unimpeded like a ship in full sail. After a while it dropped a silver propeller which swept the surface of the water like a blade. The effect was magic. That propeller whipped away the gloom that enveloped the pond, drove it in a thick murky tide under the trees. The circle of the shore pricked through, completed itself. The pond lay smooth as a plane of polished agate, frank as a mirror.

Southward swam on and on.

When she employed the breast-stroke, she went forward with swift driving jerks. She carried her head high, well out of water. A line of white throat was always visible, swelling faintly as though bridled. Occasionally she turned over on one side. Then her head ducked, sank into the hollow of her shoulder. Nothing was visible but a long lithe line of body and one slim white muscular arm, pulling her forward. At intervals, she floated; supine or prone; it was apparently equally easy. Or turning on her back, she propelled herself forward, sitting almost upright. She progressed without unnecessary movement and with no waste of energy, with the steady sinuous movement of a water-creature. It was that way with every movement Southward made; she accomplished it in the briefest possible time and with the minimum of effort. To watch her was to get an impression not only of overbrimming vitality, of high reservoirs of energy that had never

been touched, but of an extraordinary instinctive physical efficiency.

That ocean of light on which it had now embarked seemed to polish the moon to a greater brilliance. It dropped onto the pond a trail of silver scales that lay glittering and fluttering half in and half out of the water. It picked out spots in the wooded shores for special illumination; here the bole of a virgin birch, swaying nude among the pines; there a thread of brook stealing with silver footsteps under the trees; yonder a glossy parasite vine that turned to a cascade of tangible light.

Southward still swam on.

Suddenly she suspended all movement. She held herself still. She gazed about her. She seemed to sit upright in the water—that instant in which she craned to survey the scene. Her expression was a listening one. Apparently she heard nothing, saw nothing. She settled back into the water, sank her head on her shoulder, swam. But after another interval—it was as though an electric signal had been flashed under the surface—she stopped again, rose half-way out of the water, craned. Paddling gently, she raked the pond in every direction with her keen gaze.

Her eyes fastened in an instant on something that stirred the water just ahead—a black object that came steadily forward. Suddenly this object raised above the level of the pond, turned, and disclosed a face. “Hi, John!” a man’s voice hailed her.

Southward did not move. “It isn’t John,” she called promptly in her clear boyish voice.

“It isn’t,” the voice answered, palpably disappointed. “Then who the devil is it?” The head continued to draw nearer, propelled by a magnificent vigour.

Southward did not answer. But she turned, sank her head into the curve of her shoulder, made in leisurely—perhaps a shade more leisurely fashion—homewards.

The moon drew under an ice-floe on the further shore of the blue ocean. The blue ocean turned again to an agate sea. The shore of the pond lost itself in an impenetrable murk. The pond turned to jet. The stars came out by ones, by twos, pricked through the agate, dropped long smeared pear-shaped reflections on the jet; came out by scores, by myriads, covered the agate sea with a silver stencilling; dropped to the jetty pond a clear-cut silver pattern.

The head came nearer and nearer, drew alongside. Southward turned and looked at the invader of her solitude. His hair glimmered sleekly, his face was for an instant so deep in shadow that it was non-existent.

Then two triangular flashes set eyes in that shadow. A jag of phosphorescence made a smile. A big white splash, cut by a jersey strap, became a shoulder. A smaller patch, equally luminous, that clawed the water, turned into a hand.

"Well, my lad," the man said, "you're a good swimmer." There was a touch of patronage in the tone, but the voice was a pleasant one. It was young and decisive and it held a swinging element of command, even when it made this simple statement. "How do you happen to be in the water at this hour?"

Southward's face was equally shadowy. It would have been impossible, because of her obscuring shoulder, to get more than the flick of her smile and the gleam of her eyes. "Well, it's the only chance I get," she answered with the undertone of surliness of one whose right is being questioned. "I work in the grocery-store all day, and at night I feel like taking a swim."

They were now on a level, Southward on her right side, her head turned towards the stranger; he on his left side, his head turned towards her.

"I should think you would," the stranger agreed. "I only asked because as far as I could gather, we were the only ones who ever went swimming in this pond."

"You one of those fellows camping on the other side?" Southward asked.

"Yes, my name's Cameron—Dwight Cameron."

"Mine's Uriah Snow," offered Southward. Uriah Snow was the village idiot. The darkness received and obscured the rich smile which Southward shot into it.

"One of our men, Smith—the only one who is here at present—disappeared from camp an hour ago. He said something about going in bathing before he went. I got so warm I thought I'd come out and join him. I never thought to look to see if his bathing-suit was there. Haven't seen any other fellow swimming, have you?"

"Nope," answered Southward.

"He went for a walk then," Cameron commented to himself. "The short-sport."

"Why I've swum in this pond pretty nigh every night in summer for five years," Southward went on, "and this is the first time I ever met anybody here. Pretty nigh skeered me to death when I saw you coming. First I thought it was a dog, then I thought it was a deer. We get them sometimes in the fall."

Her companion made no comment. He turned now on his other side, his face away from her. He was swimming slowly; Southward had no difficulty in keeping up with him.

"Nice little town you've got here," he said finally.

"Think so?" Southward drawled. "Glad you like it."

"I suppose you have pretty good times in the winter?"

"Great Scott, I should say we did." Southward pumped a great deal of rustic fervour into her voice. "In the winter, it's great. The church has sociables every two weeks. And sometimes we have a lecture. And when there's snow, we allus have sleigh-parties."

"Sociables," the young man quoted. "What a quaint word! I've heard my mother use it. She was a New Englander—Plymouth woman."

"Where you from?" Uriah Snow asked.

"God's country," Cameron said with emphasis. "The West! Vermont originally—Colorado since, New York now. But you were telling me what you did winters here."

"Sometimes we have lectures. And sometimes travelling-shows come here. We have a movie-house. Last winter they gave two performances a week. Next year they're going to try to run three."

"My God, what a whirl!" Cameron commented. And now for an obvious instant he was making game of his rustic companion. "Good place for a fellow to be quiet in if he wanted to write," he said more seriously, half to himself.

"Oh, no, mister," Southward commented with simplicity, "he couldn't be quiet here in the winter-time. Why, there's times when a fellow's up until eleven o'clock three or four nights a week."

Cameron spluttered violently. But Southward did not exude a breath of the mirth which, in spite of herself, rippled over her face. "Sometimes," she continued recklessly, "I think if I ever marry and settle down I'm going to a quieter place. I wouldn't like to bring up a family where there's so much excitement."

At this, Cameron laughed frankly. And, "Very commendable idea," he managed to say after a while.

They swam for another interval of silence.

"Say, Snow," Cameron began again briskly, "who's that girl who lives in the big white-and-yellow house down beyond the Post Office?"

"Dark?" Southward queried, "and skinny?"

"Not skinny exactly—slim—brunette—yes, wears a pink sweater."

"Oh," Southward drawled, "that's Pearl Wallis."

"Mighty pretty girl!" Cameron commented carelessly. "Pearl Wallis. All right! Well now who's the tall one with the red hair? I don't know where she lives but I've seen her turning into the big weather-beaten house next to the church—the one with the gambrel roof and the trumpet vine."

"I get you," Southward answered. "Pinkie Peters. Wears a green and white blazer?"

"That's the one! Peters! Peters! Pinkie Peters! Pearl Wallis and Pinkie Peters. I've got them. Now who's the plump one? Runs with Miss Peters quite a bit—laughs all the time."

"Flora Tubman. Lots of pretty girls in this town, ain't there?"

"I should say. Now let me get that. Tubman—Flora Tubman. Who's the little dark one—glasses—two braids of hair—looks like an Indian?"

"Mercy Brewster. Say, I can give you a knock-down to any one of those girls if you want I should."

"Sure! I'm for that! When will you pull it off?"

"Any evening. I tell you what. They all go to the Post Office every night to the last mail. I'll be there to-morrow night. Get along about half-past five."

"All right. How'll we know each other? I couldn't tell you in this light from Adam."

"You pick out the man with the biggest crop of freckles in the place—and that's me. Say, know anything that'll take freckles off? I've tried everything I ever heard of."

"No, I don't," Cameron answered with a becoming gravity. "I'm sorry."

There came another long silence.

"Where do you get off, Snow?" Cameron broke it finally.

"The little jetty ahead, Cameron," Southward replied. "You can't see it but I can because I know it's there. My house sets jess back among the trees. Guess I'll turn in now. Good night!"

"Hold on! I'll go as far as your station," Cameron offered. "How long a swim is it across this pond?"

"About half a mile."

"Just a tidy little hike here and back," Cameron commented, "I guess I'll have to do this every night after this. We'll probably meet quite often, Snow."

"Shouldn't wonder," Southward agreed. "Hope we do, Cameron."

They made the rest of the way in silence. Southward pulled herself out of the water and onto the boards with a single athletic heave of her body. "Good night," she called.

"Good night," said Cameron. He started to paddle backwards, his face towards her.

At that moment the moon emerged from its polar foe. Clean as snow, clear as glass, it washed the scene with white fire. The light ran over Southward's sleek head, over her slim figure with its budding salience of curve to the narrow skirt which barely touched her knees.

Cameron emitted a shrill whistle, a muttered, "My——" that cut itself off half-way, and then a clear though embarrassed, "I say! I beg your pardon. But you fooled me *complete*."

Southward's only answer was a jet of mischievous laughter. She laughed all the way up to the house. She laughed all the way up to the garret. She was still laughing when she sank into bed. She fell asleep with a smile on her lips.

CHAPTER VI

ALONE, Hester Crowell began to slacken the pace which Southward had set for her. The hand that held the electric torch dropped listlessly to her side. Her gait took on the lassitude and uncertainty that always marked it when she was the guide of her own locomotion. Her head drooped. Occasionally, she stopped and surveyed the scene. Here her eye caught on a tree shape, thick enough to cut off the sky as with an enormous opaque wing or thin enough to spread across it a delicate intricate tracery of limb and leaf; there it dwelt on some cloud-shape, mountainous and inky-black, or stretching into thin strands and wefts that tangled and smothered the stars.

She was getting towards the middle of the town. Houses began to draw closer and closer, to come nearer to the road; big square bulks; smaller ones, slanting or gambrel-roofed; white and trim; vague and weather-coloured. Fences here and there placed parallel streaks of white between her and the gardens which, however they varied in regard to flower-smells, always emitted the odour of box. Here, rows of round beach-stones, painted white, marked out paths; there the jaws of a whale, also painted white, indicated entrances. Yonder the figurehead of a ship glimmered phantom-like in the gloom. Longer spaces came between the trees now, and the trees themselves looked bigger and older. Even at night, they seemed more cared-for than the wild growths she had just left. Everywhere the wine-glass elm drew its exquisite shape upon the sky. Hester passed the huge rectangle of white that was the Unitarian Church, and which shot a gleaming graceful spire among the stars; a little cluster of stores. A sign showed black lettering here and there; a tattered circus poster waved from a shed; more houses, closer and closer together. Presently the houses began to separate again, to retreat from the road. The smell of box and of late August flowers came only on a convenient breeze. The trees by the side of the road huddled together; not so big, so plethoric, or so pendulous. After a while woods began to line both sides of the road. The road itself roughened. Hester stumbled now and then.

At last she stopped at an opening on her right—a narrow path

which apparently led into dense woods. She paused a moment, idly squirting the light into the bushy areas about her. After a while, she turned in. At first the path was smooth, though narrow; then it grew rougher. Hester still walked with her eyes down.

Suddenly she stopped, and lifted her head like a deer snuffing the air. She stood stock-still an instant; then raising her light high, stood, looking keenly ahead. There was nothing in sight, but Hester did not move. She listened intently.

"Hullo, there!" a man's voice called presently. A shape—it seemed only a degree less black than the surrounding shadow—detached itself from the sooty background and bore slowly down upon her. Hester waited.

"Hullo there!" the shape called again. "Wait a moment, please." Its tone was peremptory, but pleasant.

Hester did not answer. But she waited. She directed her light over the path. The stranger came forward briskly now.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he called from a little distance. His voice lost its peremptory ring. "I thought you were a man—I had no idea it was a——" He stopped short. His words dried on his lips. He was now within vision of the yellow mandarin coat, the peacock embroidery, the little mirrors winking feebly in the diluted light, the long braid of hair that curled over Hester's shoulder and hung to her very ankles, the silver hairpins in her hand. "—a Chinese princess," he concluded.

Hester did not speak. She looked inquiringly at him. By degrees, the dim light brought out the details of his appearance. He was tall, he was dark; he wore trousers of white duck, a sack-coat of navy-blue, a Panama hat. A single vigorous gesture had swept his hat from his head and, in passing, a pipe from his mouth. Now he stood holding these two objects, leaning at the hip against his stick. His pose was extraordinarily easy; he was no more encumbered with these things than with the air itself.

"I'm lost," he explained. "I'm a stranger in Shayneford. We're camping on the other side of Long Pond. I started out in the early evening. I've had a delightful walk but I can't get anywhere. Does this lead to the main road, please?"

There was something baffling about him. He had a long handsome regularity of feature that seemed to match the long graceful muscularity of his figure. And just as his pose was easy, his smile was easy. Again just as an underlying strength and capacity for speed seemed ready to burst through the ease of his attitude, some inner turbulence seemed threatening always to flame through the

quiet of his pleasant smile. Already that interior fire had scorched his hair white at the temples, had burned lines at the corners of his eyes, hollows under them.

"Yes," Hester answered him. "Not more than three minutes' walk. Would you like me to take you to the turning? This light helps a little."

"No, I won't trouble you." The stranger said this slowly, a little hesitatingly. His smile had gone out. Without its light, his eyes became sombre, his lips enigmatic. "At least I can't justify myself in troubling you. It's very good of you though." His smile flashed again; his face was all light and life.

"Oh, not at all," Hester said formally. "Good night."

"Good night."

Hester moved briskly in her direction. The stranger moved briskly in his. But after an interval, his head turned over his shoulder and he followed the circle of light until it disappeared around a bend, carrying with it the tall, swaying, stooping figure, the yellow mandarin coat and the winking mirrors.

Hester came out presently on another road, turned into a gate at a little distance. Big trees concealed the outlines of the house, but Hester's light revealed a path between these trees. The blinds were closed in front. Hester proceeded through a small front hall, dark, a living-room, dark, a dining-room, dimly-lighted, into a larger room, half living-room, half-kitchen, well-lighted. The place was quaintly floored and doored in the style of old houses, but it showed the systematic orderliness, the hygienic cleanliness of a hospital. The walls were painted a brilliant cobalt blue, the doors and wood-work a heavy durable grey. The stove shone as though it had been silvered, the faucets, boiler, and water-pipes as though they had been gilded.

Close up to a central-table, hexagonal in shape and duck-footed, sat a woman darning.

It was evident that she was Hester's mother; though where the likeness lay was a puzzle.

Mrs. Crowell's skin was a fine powdery, pearly-white just beginning to show the mothiness of age. It lay lineless and glistening across her lips; two upper teeth had begun to press them open: it pulled so taut over the bones of her face that on the bridge of her nose was a thin, shining, diamond-shaped patch. This linelessness was not lingering youth; it was advancing age. Age had ironed, not seamed her face; it was almost without change of expression; her eyes held an unwinking steadiness. And under her chin, the skin sagged into a full wrinkled pouch of flesh.

However youth had left its marks; her yellow-white hair was thick and heavy, her lips a high scarlet; her eyes, over which long lashes still dropped an adumbrating shadow, a clear grey. She had a tall, noble figure, high busted and held in; every line of her simple home-made gown improved it. Her hands were big but slender, and, in spite of definite marks of house-keeping, aristocratic. She wore her nails long.

Mrs. Crowell flung over her darning a single quiet look at her daughter. Then as though that look met something unexpected, "Well, what's happened to you?" she demanded.

Hester had a different air. A faint colour stirred in her cheek, a gleam flickered in her eye. "Nothing," she said. "I spent the evening with Southward. She walked home a piece with me."

"What you got that thing on for?"

Vaguely, Hester looked down on the mandarin coat. "I felt a little cool at Southward's; so I borrowed this."

Her mother emitted a low purring, contemptuous laugh. "Well, it isn't your style you know. If there's anything I hate, it is to see an old maid rigging herself up to look picturesque."

Hester made no comment.

"Lucky for you it was night," her mother went on with composure. "Shayneford would have a great laugh at your expense if it saw you getting kittenish in your old age. I expect you'll take to those breakfast-caps next—something tasty in white lace with blue ribbons and pink roses on it."

Hester blushed furiously. She bit her lip. But she did not speak.

Mrs. Crowell darned silently for a while.

"What was Sarah Wallis and that crowd doing up to Mis' Drake's?" she demanded suddenly.

"I don't know, mother—talking, I suppose."

"Four of them went—Mis' Smart told me. What were they talking about and why'd they go to-day?"

"I don't know what they were talking about, mother. But I fancy they went because they thought Southward wouldn't be there. They don't like Southward, you know."

"No wonder! The way she treats them. I like to hear her go at them though. It's the first time in her life Sarah Wallis ever met her match."

There came another pause of silence.

"Do you ever hear from Josie Caldwell now?" Mrs. Crowell had the air of one spearing in her mind for floating queries.

"No. What makes you ask?"

"I wanted to know."

"I should like to hear from her," Hester said simply.

Silence fell again.

Suddenly Mrs. Crowell arose, lifted her basket, moved like a stately ship through the door, disappeared into the bedroom leading out of the dining-room.

Hester waited a while, then she lighted a lamp, went up the back-stairs.

Her room was large and low. Sloping roof and dormer windows introduced pleasing irregularities into the squareness of its shape. It was hung wherever cloth was appropriate with white muslin. Along one side ran a low book-case, painted white and crowded with books. A little white desk with the lid down occupied another wall; a white dressing-table bearing a white celluloid toilet-set occupied a third. There was a plaster bust of a baby's head on the desk and another of a baby's hand above it. Here and there pinned to the walls were unframed pictures, cut evidently from magazines, always of children. On the dresser lay many photographs—snap-shots—of a baby or of a woman with a baby; it was always the same baby and always the same woman.

Hester did not look about her. She jerked open the lower drawer of her bureau with such force that the whole piece tottered. She reached in under the piled mass of underwear and pulled something out.

It was a boudoir-cap of lace, trimmed with pale-blue ribbons and a bunch of pink-silk roses. For a moment, she held it off and looked at it—an object deliciously feminine with the pink flesh of her slim hand showing through the meshes. Then, suddenly, it was as though something welled up in her that brought mania, her face contorted, she tore and twisted and ripped it, tossed it into the waste-basket.

She turned to the bureau and picked up one of the pictures there, studied it with a look that was an equal mixture of love and anguish. It was the picture of a baby, head and shoulders, in profile. Curls ran up from the back of the neck, over the top of the head, and hung down over the forehead. The face smiled and like the face of all healthy babies in mirth everything about it seemed to smile, eyes, lips, raised brows, and dimply contours. Hester's brow contracted; her features writhed. She dropped the picture, covered her face with her hands. When she withdrew them her look was quiet again.

She undressed slowly.

With her night-gown on, she bent over the lamp as though

to blow it out. But even as her lips parted, another impulse seized her. She lifted the lamp and held it close to the mirror. Her face was as expressionless as her mother's for an instant. She searched the tired dull eyes, the sallow freckled skin, the neutral-coloured mouth with its drooping corners. Then she put the lamp back on the bureau, pulled her huge braid forward over her shoulders, began in a mad fury of haste to unplait it. She shook the strands out until they sheathed her. Seizing her hand-mirror she surveyed herself again. She stood in a cone of gold. Pivoting slowly, she caught every point of view of the light on that strange garment; it ran down its length in cataracts of sparkles. Hester sighed and put the mirror down. Gathering her hair into a sheaf again she re-plaited it. She went out into the hall and returned carrying a small black cat tucked under one arm and a quartette of complaining kittens under the other. She put them all on the floor, sat down with them. Tabby moved fastidiously away, curled her trim tail as neatly as a whip-lash about her feet; surveyed her offspring with an air of detachment. The kittens, divorced so suddenly from the warm maternal bosom, crawled unsteadily about, mewing bitterly. Hester took them up one at a time, examined their closed eyes, smoothed their tiny backs. Finally she put them back into the basket in the hall.

She brought the lamp to the little table by her bedside. Moving over to the book-shelf, she selected a book.

Crawling into bed, she read until daylight.



BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

THE sun poured down on the well-kept lawn and shot its emerald with gold. Back, the tiny Parsonage, huddling under a mantle of clematis and honeysuckle, offered a single cool spot. Directly in front, the state road, baked hard and yellow, cut like a brass tape into the distance. Beyond the road clustered the General Store, the Post Office; then came an oval, elm-encircled, of village green; then the white Unitarian Church. On the lawn, a score of tables, draped in white cheese-cloth and loaded with the litter common to bazaars, made a Stonehenge circle. Decorations, flowers, vines, boughs had begun to crisp and shrivel in the white-hot sunshine. Outside clustered buggies, carryalls, a motor or two. Inside, groups of people were moving from table to table. Some—from their simple motor-clothes obviously city-people—made swift rounds, accomplished their quick, decisive purchases, and departed or engaged in social commerce. But the majority of the women of the vicinity, in their starched and ill-fitting summer best with hats bearing no apparent relation either to the heads or the coiffures that supported them, their brown faces smiling and relaxed, proceeded in more leisurely fashion, gossiping much, buying little and only after long thought.

The Reverend Nehemiah Dodge, puffy as to shape, fatly-regular as to feature, smilingly-unctuous as to manner, navigated from group to group, talking largely and flowingly wherever he anchored and effectually blanketing sociability until he sailed away.

"So just naturally," Southward was saying to Hester, concluding an account of her adventure, "I've got to go out after him first—star indicates the heart to be broken." Her eyes glimmered with a delight purely boyish and frankly cruel.

"Lady of Kingdoms!" Hester commented.

"Lady of Kingdoms, yourself!" retorted Southward. "But let's not waste any time in personalities. They'll be here before I know it. I have my plan of campaign all worked out. I'm

watching the entrance now to see when they come in. I've instructed Libbie to introduce them to all the other girls first. Of course it's not so much fun to get them unless you take them away from somebody. And all the girls are armed to kill. Just look at them. Get Pearl being a gipsy."

A little beyond the fish-pond at which Southward presided and the candy-table at which Hester stood, an entrance opened into the Stonehenge circle. Between this entrance and the gate peaked a little white tent and within the tent, cross-legged on a cushion, sat a girl in an oriental costume of green and yellow calico. A little Zouave jacket of black velvet trimmed with coins confined the yellow blouse; a little velvet cap, also of black velvet and also trimmed with coins, covered her head. Before her lay another cushion on which, carelessly set out, was a pack of cards. Her dark hair, obviously crimped for the occasion, hung unconfined from her cap to the ground. She was a slender girl with features frailly pretty that time would inevitably pinch, and a bloom evanescently pink that time would inevitably fade. Somewhere, flashing between the big black eyes and the thin red lips, lay an expression that must, unless experience interfered, harden to her mother's look of cold malice; now it was only inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness, spirited by youth.

"Pearl hates herself bitterly to-day, doesn't she?" Southward went on with an obvious enjoyment of this picture. "There's only one thing that girl does to exercise her mind, and that is trying to think up costumes that will let her wear her hair loose. Most girls believe that they can charm *any* man if they can only parade before him with their hair down."

Southward's own hair clung tighter than usual to her round head. More tautly than ever, it rolled back from her forehead over her ears, changing in the process to a metal of burnished purple. She wore one of the slim, close-fitting linen gowns which were typical of her—so plain that, but for a faint drawing in at the waist, they were like a shift.

"Lysander hasn't taken any notice of her to-day. She's beckoning to him now. Lysander has a splendid figure! Doesn't he look stunning leaning against the tent-pole? She'll flirt with one of the new men so as to get him jealous. I've half a mind to keep Lysander here with me the whole afternoon. Would if it were anybody but Lysander and I didn't have other fish to fry. Oh, my goodness, Hetter," she went on with another access of humorous appreciation, "get Flora Cow-Tubman as a fairy!

Wouldn't you know that that would be the part Flora would pick for herself?"

The girl whom she indicated was tripping up the path from the gate. Plump—buxom indeed—blonde with a heavy high bust and a chin that was already beginning to double, she wore a full trailing robe of tarlatan, trimmed with Christmas-tree silver and a wreath of flowers at her neck and on her head. Her hair, long and ash-blonde, was also hanging. It had obviously been put up in rags the night before; it divided mathematically into soft woolly curls. Flora was pretty. And her prettiness was real if a little meaningless. Her colourings of grey eye, of pink lip, and of white skin were all stable; her features softly turned. Her expression was as unthinkingly gay as a child's—that expression was stable too. She would undoubtedly develop, whether married or single, into a pleasing, deep-tinted maternal stoutness. At sixty, she would still be sweet-looking, lovely if she chose.

"I'd give a fortune for camera privileges," Southward went on. "But Flora isn't the worst. Oh, Hetter—oh, my goodness! Don't turn too quick! It's a scream! It's a riot! Pinkie Peters as Folly."

Pinkie was a tall slim girl, a little stoop-shouldered, with eyes surprisingly blue, a skin surprisingly pink, and hair surprisingly red. That hair was hanging—a long, thick coarse mane that rippled of its own volition and broke near the ends into a natural crisp wave. Her colours were so vivid that they deadened the disappointing effect of her features. Hers was a fox-face, running down from high cheek-bones, narrower and narrower, until there was scarcely room in the meagre mouse-like jaw for the strip of scarlet mouth. Her costume, palpably home-made like the others, consisted of many over-lapping points of blue and white, each one ending in a little bell.

"It takes a girl a mile high to want to show her legs," Southward commented. "And I suppose Pinkie probably has the worst legs in town. But her hair is gorgeous. I love that colour. If Pinkie only knew enough to pencil her brows and lashes, and if somebody would only show her how to dress, she'd be wonderful-looking."

"Yes," Hester agreed, "she's pretty."

"You know, Hester, I respect Pinkie the most of the three girls. She's hard as nails, of course, as I am. Perhaps that's why I like her."

"But when you come to that," Hester went on following the line of Southward's previous remark, "Pearl and Flora are aw-

fully pretty girls too. And I really don't think they look so bad in those costumes."

Hester herself looked almost as bad as she could look. Her tight-fitting over-trimmed country muslin accented her gauntness, and at the same time suppressed her colouring. Her hair was piled haphazard on her head. She looked hollow-eyed, tired, hot.

"Well, perhaps if you say it quick," Southward admitted grudgingly. "People are beginning to come," she added after a pause. "This is going to be a successful day."

About the gate, the vehicles were gathering in a huge confused mass. Hay-ricks and excursion-barges from neighbouring towns kept dumping their dusty perspiring loads; motors arriving in greater and greater frequency set down fresh trim city-groups. The Reverend Nehemiah, increasingly bland, increasingly unctuous, was navigating more and more swiftly, putting a conversational pall on every group he approached. Sue-Salome, a big doll on one arm, a little book in her hand, was trotting briskly from man to man, enticing nickels from horny hands. Libbie, her earrings twinkling in the brilliant sunlight, made an equally successful progress with a rag-rug. From time to time, the sisters met for a brief interval in which they exchanged breathless comments. Mrs. Tubman's shapeless bulk was rooted on one spot at the fancy-articles table, but her scuttling eye roved ceaselessly, picking up stray morsels of observation as though it were a beak. Mrs. Wallis, making change, constantly fluffed her mat of artificial hair, constantly pushed down her corset-steel, darted her quick, bright-eyed glances from spot to spot. For long appraising intervals, Mrs. Peters surveyed the whole scene over her nose.

"Ah," Southward said suddenly. "Here they are—Dwight Cameron and John Smith—Cameron's the blonde."

Two men had come in through the Parsonage gate. They stood for an unembarrassed second frankly looking about them, the most conspicuous figures on the lawn.

They were tall and good-looking, but those were their only points in common. John Smith was slender and thinly-muscular; even at a distance it looked as though there were packed onto the bony structure of his body much muscle but no flesh. The regularity of his features gave him a look of caste. He was brown-skinned, brown-haired, brown-eyed; but his face was lined and there was a fleck of grey at his temples. He stood now in an attitude noticeably easy, leaning at the hip on his stick. His

face bore a smile which even at that distance was bafflingly pleasant.

Dwight Cameron, though quite as tall, seemed shorter because he was stockier. His light brown hair had already faded in streaks of yellow and flaxen; his fair skin had first burned, then browned. Against this tanned background, his eyes took a deeper blue than was natural to them, his teeth a white that was almost luminous. His face had none of his companion's high-bred regularity of line; it had a marked but agreeable irregularity. His expression was that of a good-humoured arrogance which broke at the eyes into a look of incipient laughter.

Having surveyed the scene at their leisure, the two men started briskly forward.

"Will you have your fortune told?" Pearl Wallis called as they passed her tent. "I read the future in your palm or in the cards." She dropped her eyes coquettishly.

The men stopped and parleyed with her. In the end, Dwight Cameron disappeared inside the tent. The flap fell half forward, but not before it was to be seen that—sitting Turk-fashion on the floor in front of the fair fortune-teller—he had given her his palm to read. His companion continued at a leisurely pace, his gloves in one hand, his stick hooked on the other arm, in the direction of the Stonehenge circle.

Flora Tubman met him at the entrance. She presented a book to him and stood explaining her mission. He gravely put his name down on half a dozen pages picked at random. He continued to talk with her after he had signed for the last time. In a few minutes, Pinkie Peters broke into their tête-à-tête. Flora introduced Mr. Smith to Pinkie. Pinkie presented her book. Mr. Smith again put his name on half a dozen pages chosen at random. He listened with a quizzical deferentiality to their observations. He made numerous observations of his own. He laughed. But at intervals, his glance went beyond their faces, searched that section of the Stonehenge circle which it faced.

After a while, Dwight Cameron emerged from the tent and joined the group. John Smith introduced Cameron to the girls. A shift in their position brought Smith's gaze to the other half of the Stonehenge circle. And as before, his gaze went past the two girls—at quicker intervals now, for Cameron was monopolising their attention—to the new semi-circle. The sun was in his face here; again and again its strong glare proved too much for him. After a while, he walked back towards Pearl's tent. Again the flap fell part-way over the entrance but not

before it was evident that he had chosen the cards in preference to palmistry.

"Pearl's got first shot at both of them," Southward said, dropping her lids over the brilliant blue and black glimmer in her eyes. "Foxy little Pearl!"

"Be careful, Southward," Hester breathed.

Dwight Cameron still stood talking with the girls. He had none of his friend's air, quietly deferential, quizzically humorous, of attention. He dominated the situation. It was he who asked the questions. It was the girls who answered them. He laughed often, but they laughed oftener; for his laugh was full of an arrogant infection. Quite frankly and even while openly he harried his companions, his gaze shot in and out of the tables in what was obviously search. Presently his companion joined them. The four stood talking and laughing. Mr. Dodge bore down on the group with the slow bumpy precision of a ferry-boat making the slip.

"Puts a spoke in Pinkie's wheel," said Southward with entire content.

"Southward—don't," was Hester's only comment. She went on all the time conscientiously selling her goods and making her accurate change.

The Reverend Nehemiah inundated the strangers with a Niagara of bromidic comment. Two men joined the group; Thode Snow a grown-up fat-boy, blond and a mouth-breather; King Curtis, thin and brown with teeth conspicuously false and shoulders monstrously padded. The Reverend Nehemiah introduced them to the strangers. Now the seven stood talking in what was obviously the surface civilities of group conversation. Suddenly the crowd split. A delegation of women, who had just entered the gate, surrounded the pastor, tugged him off to shoal waters. King Curtis cut Flora Tubman from what remained of the group. Thode Snow engaged Pinkie. The strangers started with alacrity to make the round of the tables. Sue-Salome came bustling and twinkling across their path. They stopped her. They put a question to her. She nodded an assent. She led them in a diagonal course that exactly bisected Stonehenge and ended between the candy counter and the fish-pond.

"It's coming, Hester," Southward announced, her casual gaze on the sky apparently reviewing the weather, "they've asked to be introduced and they're making a bee-line for us. Flora and Pinkie are ready to chew barbed-wire and Pearl could bite the banisters. But let nobody say I didn't give them a fair chance."

"Southward," Hester remonstrated wildly, "they'll hear you."

"Oh, no, they won't," Southward said without lowering her voice. "Remember, me for the blonde! Yes, of course," she went on in a cool clear voice, "I prefer H. G. Wells. Not that Henry James hasn't his attractions for me. I mean in the matter of style——"

"Southward," Sue-Salome interrupted briskly, "and Hester, I'll make you acquainted with Mr. Cameron and Mr. Smith. Miss Drake and Miss Crowell. If Libbie and I ain't had the worst time! We was depending on May Howes and she not only don't show up but she ain't so much as sent us a word—— There! If that ain't she coming in now. You'll excuse me for I've got to see her at once."

The girls had in the meantime bowed, Hester speechlessly, Southward with a conventional murmur. "I'm Miss Drake and my friend is Miss Crowell," Southward explained with a gravity that even put out her blue and black shimmer. "You couldn't tell which was which from the introductions." She presented a business-like impassivity to Mr. Cameron's keen gaze. "Could I tempt either of you or both of you to try your fortunes in the fish-pond? I'll guarantee that you'll hate anything you get."

"I'll take six chances at once," Mr. Cameron decided promptly. "Lead me to it." They drew away from the other two and leaned over the hogshead draped with cheese-cloth that was the fish-pond. Southward handed her victim a pole. He dropped it inside, made a skilful pretence of not being able to catch the loops of string, arranged obviously for easy hooking.

"Are aquatic sports your speciality?" he queried carelessly. He fixed his arrogant gaze on Southward; the look of incipient laughter in his eyes became real mirth.

"No," said Southward in a musing tone, "not especially."

"Meaning for instance," Cameron went on, "do you swim?"

A glimmer came stealing into the depths of Southward's eyes. But she dropped her lashes at once and studied his undirected efforts with the fishing-pole.

"Oh, yes!" she answered coolly, as one remembering. "I do swim a little. How remarkably inexperienced you are!"

"Yes, it's an art in itself," Cameron admitted with a coolness that was the fellow of hers. "Do you ever swim at night?" he went on in a casual tone.

"Oh, yes," Southward answered with an appearance of artless enthusiasm. "I've just returned from Oldtown where we went into the ocean every night."

"Really!" Cameron commented. For an instant, he lost some of his poise. He looked unsettled and perplexed. Then, "When did you come from Oldtown?" he demanded suddenly.

"Let me see," Southward replied lazily, "I'll have to think. A week ago? No. Two or three days ago. What day is this? Monday, isn't it?" Then at her companion's impatient nod, "I got home Friday."

Cameron's face flashed its big smile. "Friday!" he ejaculated. Then "Eureka!" Then, "Oh, you mermaid!"

Southward only laughed.

"I went swimming last night," he said reproachfully. "I swam until I was nearly parboiled. Why didn't you come again?"

"You speak as though it were a hundred years ago," Southward commented.

"It was—a thousand."

"One night," Southward corrected him.

"Will you come to-night?" Cameron asked eagerly. "It was the most remarkable thing that ever happened to me. It was so confoundedly unexpected and romantic; it's just obsessed me."

"Well," Southward had the appearance now of candid logic, "it can't ever be romantic again—if romance depends on unexpectedness."

"But it doesn't exactly. Oh, please come. Come again to-night. Say, you'll come, please, *please!*" Cameron had used the word *please* twice, but he did not entreat at all; he commanded.

Southward, in an instant of cool and calculated observation, seemed to take account of this. "I really don't know," she answered indifferently, "whether I shall feel like swimming to-night."

"Oh, please come!" Cameron said again. And now some of the arrogance had gone out of him. His voice employed a note of entreaty.

"There!" Southward's voice was full of a delight, purely benevolent, "you've hooked a fish."

Purely by accident he had. "Damn!" he muttered.

"I beg pardon," Southward murmured.

"I said I had!" he explained. He drew out his package, opened it. "Pen-wiper!" he commented. "You deceived me. I don't hate that. I need a pen-wiper. I always use the portières. Please promise me that you'll come to-night."

"Well, you see," Southward said in a disinterested tone, "it all depends on how I feel at eleven o'clock. By the way, you've got five other chances, you know."

He bit his lip. And he began to fish rapidly as though to get an unpleasant business over. He drew in succession a moustache-cup, a pin-cushion, a pin-tray. "Hand-painted!" was his comment on this. "That's valuable." A sheaf of shaving-paper under an embroidered cover came next, a satin handkerchief-case. "Please say you'll come," he begged, when the last fish had been revealed. And now his tone was actually humble.

"All right," Southward agreed, "I'll start from my side of the pond at eleven."

"I'll meet you just beyond," Cameron promised. "Oh, here are some more customers." He dropped into the background.

More and more people were arriving. Carriages were coming in steady lines; motors were constantly whirring, churning, exploding as they stopped at the entrance or started off from it; at train-time station-barges drew up, depositing their loads. There was a file, almost continuous, from the gate past the fortune-teller's tent, to the arch of flags. The tables were beginning to show bare places. The fish-pond sold out once and had to be replenished from stores under a neighbouring counter. Hester's home-made candies and cakes moved in steady files from her table; her helpers were constantly diving into boxes at the rear for fresh goods. The Reverend Nehemiah floated blandly from group to group. On Mrs. Wallis's cheeks lay two hard bright patches of colour—the result of unwonted arithmetic. Mrs. Tubman's dull eye had gone absolutely blank and cold; and the live one scuttled less feverishly from point to point. Mrs. Peters looked over her nose less frequently but with more concentration. In the fortune-teller's tent, business was brisk; the flap was never up for longer than a second. Folly with the clock in her arms tinkled from spot to spot, Thode Snow always at her elbow. Flora had put her foot through her tarlatan skirt twice. Her crown of flowers had faded; but exertion had brought a deeper bloom to her smooth cheeks. King Curtis did not leave her side. Lysander still stood on the outskirts of the crowd, coolly watching everybody.

"I hope I didn't frighten you the other night," Mr. Smith had in the meantime opened conversation with Hester. "You see, I thought at that hour it would be a man. I had forgotten how fearlessly country-girls go about. It did occur to me afterwards though that I might have offered to take you home. I was too afraid at the time; you seemed awfully competent at that moment."

"Nobody has ever called me competent before," Hester said.

"It's pleasant to hear it. I wasn't frightened a bit of course. I wondered afterwards if you got home all right. I'm afraid I didn't give you very explicit directions."

"Oh, I had no difficulty whatever. I found that Cameron had come to the conclusion that I was drowned. He was starting to drag the pond. Then it occurred to him to see if my bathing-suit was there. It was; so he gave it up."

There came a brief pause. Mechanically, Hester straightened out the squares of cake, the dishes of candy.

"You were rather startling in that yellow Chinese coat," Smith went on after a while. His pleasant voice had a slight touch of diffidence. "It was like seeing a ghost—I shall always feel as though I *had* seen a Chinese ghost."

"It's a very wonderful coat, I think." In Hester's soft voice there was a touch of diffidence also. She went on eagerly to talk of Southward as though she could transfer the onus of her embarrassment to other shoulders. "It belongs to Miss Drake. You ought to see *her* in it. She has dozens of them though. One of her ancestors brought a lot back from China. I don't know why, I'm sure. Of course many of the old houses here are full of Chinese stuff, but hers is the only one that has any Chinese clothes."

"Perhaps he took unto himself a Chinese wife and brought home her wardrobe. Miss Drake ought to give that yellow one to you, though. That's yours by every rule of ownership."

"Southward's always trying to give it to me—and two or three others that she thinks are becoming to me. But I can't take them. I hate to destroy the collection. I think some of them must be precious; they're undoubtedly very old."

"I should like to see them," said Smith. "I like Chinese things."

"I'm very sure that Southward would gladly show them to you," Hester answered simply.

"Well, now," Smith changed the subject suddenly, "it's up to me to spend some hard-earned gold. That cake looks good. Good, is what I say in several languages and every degree of emphasis. I say, Dwight——"

He raised his voice a little.

Cameron turned about. It was extraordinary what a thunderous frown his blond face could produce. "What is it?" he demanded impatiently.

"Look at this cake," Smith ordered. "Never in your life have you seen anything like it! We haven't had any cake since we

got down here. I'm thinking of buying the entire crop. How can we get it home?"

"Take a taxi!" Cameron snapped and turned a shoulder on his friend.

"No enthusiasm in that quarter," Smith commented, "although I give you my word, Miss Crowell, to-night he'll murder me for not having lugged the whole lot back to camp on my back. I guess I'll have to content myself with vicarious enjoyment. Hullo, kids." He turned suddenly on the group of children who, arriving the instant before, had made a bee-line for Hester's counter. "What'll you have, cake or candy?"

There were half a dozen of them, boys and girls, slim, sun-burned, freckled, forced into unaccustomed shoes and their lank country best. The boys announced their preferences with dumfounding clearness and speed, but the girls were inclined to be non-committal. Smith was sufficiently adroit with them, however; he teased and coaxed until the last shy maid had lisped her choice. Then he proceeded to satisfy a later and smaller group who, sensing loot across the field, came trooping over, displaying even to the smallest girl no shame whatever. Cameron, catching the spirit of the occasion, interrupted his talk with Southward, insisted on doing what he called, "blowing them to a fish."

The dozen children surrounded the fish-pond, each clamouring to be first. Cameron ended by dividing his spoils among them; all except the moustache-cup which he vowed to cherish as long as life was "to" him.

Increasing crowds made it impossible for the men to hold their positions longer. They withdrew for an interval, in which they made the rounds of the other tables, submitting to spoliation at the hands of various types of rustic beauty and rustic enterprise. Occasionally they doubled back on their tracks to snatch a tête-à-tête, but the increasing crowds made impossible more than a remark or two.

Gradually, however, the crowds began to thin. Empty yellow busses drew up to the door and departed packed with people and bundles. Buggies and carryalls drove off over-loaded. Motors carried passengers on the running-boards. Those who were left walked staidly up the dusty country-roads. The three girls, Pearl and Flora and Pinkie, were changing their clothes in the Parsonage. Their three swains waited outside. Lysander had disappeared.

"Seventy-five dollars and thirty-seven cents," Mrs. Wallis an-

nounced triumphantly, adding up the last handful of coins. "Lord, I'm just about ready to drop!" chirped Libbie Hatch. "Sue says she hates the sight of money." "Land, don't this place look ready to ride out," sighed Mrs. Peters. "We'll all have to come over to-morrow morning and clean up."

The lawn did indeed look draggled wherever the litter of paper permitted it to be seen. The vines and boughs hung ragged and shrivelled from the dismantled tables.

"Will you let me walk home with you, Miss Drake?" Dwight Cameron had taken the precaution to ask early in the afternoon, forestalling Lysander who immediately afterwards came forward with the offer of a lift.

"And I'll carry these things for you, Miss Crowell," John Smith said, as he helped stow away alien belongings in the Parsonage barn. "That is, if you don't mind."

"Thank you. I shall enjoy it very much," Hester answered with her quaint rustic formality.

"Do you like Shayneford, Mr. Smith?" Hester began as they emerged from the Parsonage lawn to the dusty road.

"Oh, immensely! It's charming—absolutely unspoiled, simple, quaint, and all that sort of thing. It has a flavour of its own too. I don't wonder painters like it. It isn't quite like any place I've ever seen. We're all strong for it."

"How did you happen to come here?"

"Shut my eyes and stuck a pin in the map, haphazard," Smith explained. "How do you like it?" he asked unexpectedly.

Hester did not speak for a moment. "I see in it—and feel in it—all that you see and feel, I suppose," she began after a while in a tone measured and even. "It is as you say quaint, full of a flavour of its own with a quality that artists very much admire. But——" Her voice changed.

"But," her companion prodded her, "please go on!"

Hester did not however speak.

"Please go on," he entreated.

"Well," Hester took it up again, "I realize that all you say is true." Her voice accelerated in speed; it grew hotter, keener; her breath came between her words, a sharp quick pull inward and then a spurt outward. "I also realise that it is—gone-to-seed—bleak, blank, stark, dead, a mere empty shell—of what was once a lively and energetic little town—a place that saps and taps and cuts and bleeds—and strangles the young and suffocates—and dulls—and deadens—and paralyses—and ossifies

the old. If I had my way, I'd leave it this instant and not see it again for years. It's a grave-yard."

Hester's whole aspect had changed. Suppressed fire now sent out a flame from every point of her personality. Her colour had risen; her eyes glittered; her sultry hair quivered and sparkled.

Smith listened, composed.

"Yes, of course," he said in an amused tone. "I see all that, but it wouldn't occur to me that you could. After all, you're a kind of rebel, aren't you? Comrade Hester Crowell, in the spirit of revolt, I salute you."

"Are you a Socialist?" Hester asked.

"In a way. I think I haven't been expelled from the party recently."

"You're the only one I've ever seen," Hester said, "except Mr. Hollowell."

"On the contrary," Smith contradicted, "the man who runs the garage—Doten—is a Socialist. Your grocer is a Socialist, and the little girl who presides over the candy-shop is a Socialist. I've had long talks with all three of them."

"Myra Barry!" Hester exclaimed. "I can't believe it."

"Go down some day and talk with her," Smith suggested. "You're one yourself of course, although you may not know it yet."

Hester shook her head. "No, I'm afraid of such things. Socialism, anarchism—the very names frighten me—even equal suffrage some. Don't they frighten you?"

"Not at all. I'll whisper a deadly terrible secret to you if you promise not to tell though—they bore me like the dickens sometimes. All modern warfare is a bore anyway—even a battle." Before Hester could speak, he turned the subject. "Have you lived here long?"

"All my life," Hester answered, "and I've never really been away."

"And has Miss Drake always lived here?"

"Yes, but she's gone away occasionally—to New York once—and we've both been to Boston many times. But she's tied here too."

"She's an amazing type," Smith said meditatively.

"Isn't she lovely?" Hester demanded fervently. "Or would you call her beautiful?"

"I would call her neither," Smith answered. "But she's pretty—unbearably, mercilessly, unfairly, pretty. She's got the

air that in women most terrifies me—of being absolutely sure of herself.”

“Oh, yes, she’s sure of herself,” Hester agreed. “It’s the thing about her that most fascinates me. That’s a curious thing,” she went on, smiling. “Your friend Mr. Cameron has the same air and as it happens, although it enchants me in Southward, it’s the quality that most frightens me in men. It would be a long time before I should be at my ease with Mr. Cameron. Southward may be *sure* but he’s *cocksure*. For instance,” she went on analytically, “he’s not really good-looking when you examine him. But that cocksureness of his hypnotises you into thinking he is.”

“Oh, yes, he gets away with that in fine style,” Smith agreed. “It’s sheer *beauté du diable* with him as, in a way it is with Miss Drake. You’re quite right. It’s the arrogance of the young brute.”

Hester did not speak. She had that quality of intense listening that at times seems to concentrate into a wordless question or a soundless exclamation.

“It’s done him good coming here,” Smith went on. “He’s on the *Planet* in New York—star-reporter. He came from Vermont originally; then he went West. He’s been in New York five years now. He’s done and is still doing the most brilliant reportorial work—but he’s got enough out of that, and besides he’s doing it with his left hand. I want him to break away now and free-lance for a while. By the way, he’s the author of one novel—a short novel—that had made considerable success three or four years ago—*Ginger*.”

“Did he write *Ginger*?” Hester asked in an interested voice. “I loved that.”

“So did everybody,” Smith averred. “He’s been intending during the five years he’s been in New York to write its successor. But he hasn’t done it yet. You see New York’s got hold of him a little. He’s a well-known figure there and he’s reaping all the rewards and penalties of charm of personality. Oh, I don’t mean that he’s definitely hurt by it. His ability is all there of course—bursting with suppression. But you can form no idea of what in the way of temptation New York has to offer such a good-looking, healthy, virile young beggar as Dwight. I take him apart regularly every two months and show him how all the works are going bad. It’s surprising what he stands from me. But in fact, I abducted him to get him down here. He was, between ourselves, quite noticeably and unmistakably drunk when

I took possession of him. When he woke up, he was fighting mad. But he's so crazy about the place now that I'm going to have difficulty in getting him back on the job. He's been exercising—really exercising—for the first time since he came to New York, swimming, running, boxing with me and Morena. The best part of it is that he's bubbling over with ideas for stories. He'll do something some day—I don't know what it will be—and sometimes I think it may not be writing at all—but he'll do it."

"Say, this is a great little burg," Cameron was in the meantime saying to Southward. "You Cape Codders are different from what I thought. Seem to render up the keys of the city to the stranger on a velvet cushion."

"Glad you like it," Southward remarked politely. "I hate it like poison myself."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Oh, I say—I can't believe that."

"You don't have to live here, you know."

"Sure! You're right. I'd hate it like the dickens if I had to stay here," Dwight agreed. "Why don't you go away?"

"Can't," Southward answered laconically. "Responsibilities!" she added, as though definitely turning the subject. "Tell me about your friend John Smith."

"I would rather talk about you."

"Oh, I'm coming to that," Southward promised.

"Or me."

"Well, I may even get to that—much later though."

"All right," Cameron said, "I'll admit that next to myself and the girl I happen to be with, I talk with more enthusiasm about J. Smith, Esquire, than any other human being on this terrestrial ball. Old John is a person. He's good Indian, an old scout, a regular fellow, and all those things people say. He's the whitest human being I ever knew. I'd give the last drop of my blood for him. He's a queer cuss though. He's a red-hot Socialist although he's always fighting with the party. But he's really got a sense of humour. He gave up a good job with a handsome salary on *The Moment*, a growing weekly, to go over and fight on *Progress*, a lone dog of a Socialist sheet that puts up a fierce Socialist howl once a week on the East Side. He's put some punch into it, let me tell *you*. It's so full of red corpuscles that people actually read it." He paused and flashed his good-humoured arrogant grin, "I don't mean Socialists—I mean *people*."

Let me tell you my favourite story about John. He was living down in the slums. There was an Irish couple had a room on the same floor. The husband was a good enough young fellow but when he got any booze in him, he always wanted to fight. He got into the way of beating his wife up. She was all broken up about it and confided in John. She wouldn't have her husband arrested of course—they never do—and yet she wanted to stop it. Well, what do you think John did?"

"I don't know."

"She was a great husky she-Dogan—a pippin too—I saw her once. Well, John gives her boxing lessons. And the next time her husband started to rough-house, she licked him good *and* proper. Somebody told his friends and they joshed him so he signed the pledge out of sheer shame. But that isn't all about John—he's got more courage than any man I know—I mean real courage, regular hit-a-man-twice-as-big-as-yourself courage. He's naturally the sweetest and most peaceable citizen on earth. And yet—— Say, if he sees a fight going on at the foot of the street, he runs down and plunges into it up to his neck. Doesn't make any difference who it is or what it's about—just so it's a fight. John needs a guardian. He's crazy. He's got the strength of ten thousand gorillas. And if there's a risk of life he can possibly take, he takes it. I used to have a fair degree of the spirit of the adventurer myself. But travelling with John has turned me into the most quiet, mild-mannered, peaceable gink you ever saw. A man really has to kick me in the face now before I realise I'm insulted—I've had to smooth down so many fights that John gets into."

"Now I wouldn't think he was that kind at all," Southward remarked thoughtfully.

"Well, who would?" Cameron demanded. "Now let's talk about ourselves."

CHAPTER II

"WHAT do you think of my set?" Southward asked Hester. "Observe 'set,'" she added parenthetically. "I would have said 'setting' before I met Dwight Cameron."

"It's charming," Hester answered, "except the flowers. Southward, you can make flowers grow, but you can't arrange them prettily—you're too ruthless."

The table was laid in the orchard to the left of the Drake house and in its deepest shade. The heavy August air was so coloured by the green that the grass threw up and the leaves threw down that it seemed translucent, almost opaque. It might have floated away like a huge emerald bubble but that it was held in by the closeness of the ancient, bent, sagging, umbrella-like trees that stood straight or sagged listlessly or leaned drunkenly or knelt outright, opening crazy vistas in every direction through the lush, orchard-grass. The old brass of the samovar, the old blue of the cups, the old silver of the spoons, made high lights in this soft gloom. Southward watched Hester as she rearranged the flowers in the big Canton bowl on the table. With strong pulls and twists her slim long hands forced the dahlias into a beautiful composition.

"'Swell' is the word," said Southward. "It looks to me like a magazine-cover. I wish I had a greyhound and a peacock to make it really ancestral."

She said this with that blue-and-black glimmer which, with her, always betokened humorous appreciation. That gleam rarely left her eyes nowadays and as though life were one long enjoyment, her soft lips parted constantly in their boy's smile. The open V of her middy-blouse displayed a triangle of tanned flesh, in which rose warred with bronze. This same colour lay on her smooth cheeks and on her bared forearms.

Change had come into Hester's face too. It had lighted in some indescribable way. A torch burned constantly behind her eyes. She was looking particularly well; for the white linen-skirt and middy-blouse were too simple to hurt her appearance. And the triangle of blond flesh at the neck was in her case just touched with the velvety pink of perpetual burn.

"Well, Casanova'll have to do," Hester suggested. She turned to a monstrous black cat who sunned himself luxuriously in a patch of sunlight that had floated down through the tree-openings. "He's ten years old, isn't he? That's ancestral enough for a cat."

"Quite!" agreed Southward. "Say, they won't have any idea from this lay-out that we haven't been serving tea every afternoon since we were born, will they? Ancestral mahogany, china, silver, and bamboo. I don't know what more they can ask in the way of scenery. Little they'll guess that, inside, the lower rooms are one refined orgy of haircloth, jig-sawed oak, and cut glass."

"They probably won't notice anything," Hester said. "Men don't."

"Don't you fool yourself, Hetter," Southward disagreed. "These men do. They're different from any men we've ever known. They notice everything—*everything*—the least little thing! Of course Mr. Cameron's a reporter—it's his job. But sometimes it startles me, I must confess, especially when I'm trying to slip something over on him."

"They're the most interesting men that I ever met in my life," Hester said. "I'm enjoying them so much that I can't believe it's true. I'm so afraid I'll wake up. Why it seems to me I've lived a century this last week."

"Yes, they're interesting," Southward admitted. "At first I wondered what their game was. I'll admit it. You know I'm suspicious of men."

"I know it, Southward," Hester commented in a baffled tone. "And I can't see why."

"Well," Southward laughed a little uneasily. "Perhaps I'll tell you sometime. But they're regular fellows all right," she ended evasively.

"Did you go in swimming last night?" Hester asked.

"I did!" said Southward, her eyes all glimmer, "and the night before and the night before that and the night before that. It's a regular engagement. And nobody's discovered it yet. Of course this house is a tomb by ten o'clock and nobody ever goes near the pond. That's part of the lark of it—the secrecy."

Hester did not say anything. For an instant she looked troubled. But ultimately she burst into laughter, though palpably in spite of herself. "I love it!" she confessed.

"The thing I like most about them," Southward went on, reverting to a former theme, "is that they're as fond of each other

as you and I. You ought to hear Dwight Cameron talk about John Smith. He says that of all the men he knows, he'd pick John soonest as a husband for his sister. He says John's as able as the deuce, the finest, straightest, cleanest man morally—and a perfect specimen physically."

Hester's brow gathered into folds. "Now what does that make me think of——" she meditated aloud. "Oh, yes, I know. That night we stepped in to see Gert Beebee and the baby. Heavens, doesn't that seem a long time ago? Do you remember that what she said—that she'd picked the best-looking man she ever saw for the father of her child?"

"Yes—and Hetter—I stopped in to see Gert the other day. She's as happy as the day is long with that kid. She says she realises that she's always wanted a baby and now she's got it, it doesn't make any particular difference to her how it came. I regretted bitterly that Mrs. Wallis wasn't there to hear that."

"It's wonderful, isn't it?" Hester said. "I could almost find it in my heart to envy Gert."

"Here they come," Southward exclaimed, darting an oblique glance up the North Lane. "Let us sit down and be discovered conversing with a languid elegance." She slid into one of the Indian chairs, leaned back, lolled. "Do you like opera, Miss Crowell?" she asked in a bored tone.

Hester, sitting stiffly upright, laughed and in the laughing, relaxed a little. "Not so well as the drama," she came back.

"Good for you, Hester!" Southward encouraged her. "I simply dote on Wagner myself. Oh, good afternoon!" she raised her voice. "Hester and I are giving an imitation of two ladies sustaining a vivid conversation on art and letters while they languish for the men to arrive."

The two men stopped. "You've nothing on us," Dwight Cameron said. "We've been trying to plan an entrance like a leading-man."

"I had hoped for a rustic gate," added Smith. "It was my intention to vault lightly over." He stopped an instant. "Miss Drake," he announced, "I've simply got to stand here until I get all this."

"Stand there for an hour," Southward said. She walked slowly over to their side. Hester followed her. The two men stood silent, staring about them. The two girls stood, looking alternately from the men to the scene.

The Drake house was really a mansion, perfectly preserved, left over from high-coloured, post-colonial days. The front and back

were of wood, the sides of brick; the latter bore each the iron S typical of the epoch. It had been a big square bulk at first, but later an ell had been joined to it at a right angle. By means of many additions—a barn first, then shed after shed—this ell ran a long way off to the side. The paint, originally white, had softened to a grey that was like silver velvet and the barn-doors, originally green, had faded to a blue that was like peacock silk. The main house still stood on a high terrace. In front, sloping down from the beautiful, carved, fan-lighted door-way through gigantic box-hedges, ran a flagged path. The path stopped at an elaborate wooden gate which was part of a fence as exquisitely designed and executed as a piece of carved ivory; a combination of posts which sustained urns and of palings which supported garlands. On the white of this fence also, time had laid a grey plushy softness. And within the enclosure there was not a flash of alien colour, not a hint of irregularity of shape. Everything was green and of formal cut; it might have been Italy. The bosomy box-hedges, from which not a leaf was missing, struck the highest note of colour—a clear, vivid, piercing, sacred green. And matching the hedges with shapes as exact and geometric, pines, cypresses, powdered spruces ran through all the lower shades of green. The Drake mansion mouldered. It had a look—the woods sweeping close around it—almost of decay. But it was the exquisite decay of a gentlewoman who, in spite of blighting poverty, faces the world with all the family traditions in her bearing.

“Good Lord!” Cameron said at last. “Isn’t it——?” He did not complete his question.

“It’s——” John Smith did not complete his answer. “And this orchard here and the flowers beyond. And then the trees——Wow!”

Southward stared towards the table; the others followed, the men still foaming exclamatory adjectives and broken phrases.

“Isn’t this orchard a pippin?” Smith went on. “There are no orchards like the New England orchards.”

“It’s a novel,” Cameron answered. “Plenty of ‘spirit of place’ here.” He looked about like a man under a spell. For an instant the others were silent, as though they might all have fallen under that spell.

It was one of those moments between breezes when nature seems to sink into a trance. The quiet air was like a greenish crystal. The still trees were almost stiff. The orchard looked like a gigantic replica of one of those carvings that the Japanese make from jade. Verd antique, tourmaline, malachite, the tint varied, but it was

always green. Translucent where the sun caught it, it thickened below. Olive shadows lay sombre and solid under the bushes.

"It's the prettiest orchard in Shayneford," Hester said, smiling her sympathy, "I've always said that."

"Who takes care of the garden?" Smith went on, still standing.

"I do," Southward answered promptly, "with these fair hands, do I do it."

"She's a perfect marvel with flowers," Hester interpolated. "She can make anything grow."

Dwight Cameron had already seated himself. His gaze drifted gradually to Southward, dipped an instant, darted away, came back, stayed. John Smith's look went to her also for an instant of appraisement. "May I smoke, Miss Drake?" he asked.

Southward nodded. Smith pulled from his pocket a pipe and a rubber crescent of tobacco. He filled the bowl, thumbed it down hard, lighted it, began to puff. He seated himself where he could look at the velvety façade of the house. "I should think she could," he was all the time saying, "I should think anything would grow for Miss Drake. I would. I'm frightened to death of her. I wouldn't dare disobey her."

"Well, see that you remember that," Southward warned him. It was obvious that this pleased her. She laughed. "You know I've an awful temper—the Drake—— Have you heard of the Drake temper yet?"

She spoke banteringly but underneath her badinage peered the pride with which people always mention idiosyncratic family faults.

"No," said John Smith, "I haven't. But I'd like to." He seated himself at the table, still puffing comfortably. "Go on!"

"You'll hear of it sooner or later. So you might as well hear it from me. The Drakes are famous for their tempers and, if I do say it as shouldn't, their courage. My grandfather——" She lifted the cover of the samovar and peered in. "—killed—— Tea'll be ready when this samovar gets good and ready and not an instant before—a man once." She put the cover back on the samovar.

"Well, if he did it in the *dégagé* way in which you relate it," Dwight Cameron commented, "it must have been a very elegant event."

Southward showed the edge of her little teeth below the raspberry of her upper lip. "No, he was a little excited at the time. It came about this way. Grandfather was passing Nate Warner's house one day. He heard a woman screaming. Nate Warner, I should say, was the village bully, a member of a degenerate family

living down Pumpkin Hollow way. Grandfather ran round the back of the house and found Nate beating his mother. Grandfather rushed straight towards them, yelling to Nate to stop. Nate's answer came from a revolver. And he shot grandfather twice, once in the leg and once in the thigh. But grandfather kept right on coming. He seized Warner before he could shoot him again, yanked the revolver from him and they struggled back and forth, grandfather bleeding from his two wounds and of course the old woman by this time beating grandfather from the rear." Southward glimmered her appreciation of this picture. "Well, suddenly the struggle ended. Nate dropped—grandfather had shot him."

"Pretty play," Dwight Cameron remarked. John Smith puffed tranquilly on, his gaze going from Southward's face to Hester's and back by way of the gloom-filled orchard. "What happened next?" he asked.

"Oh, grandfather was arrested for murder, but the coroner's jury acquitted him next day. He took care of old Mrs. Warner until she died. And of course she lived in a comfort she had never known. The curious part of it was that she realised this and grew very fond of grandfather. She was always sending up to the house dishes of things she'd cooked for him. I remember particularly because he always gave them to me. Oh, grandfather," she called without stirring. "Here he comes out, up from the pond. I want you to meet him."

Mr. Drake's crooked, squat, powerful figure had emerged from the grape-arbour at the back. Limping through the high grass in the crouch of his perpetual cramp, he had more than ever the look of a crushed gorilla. The men arose. "Grandfather, this is Mr. Smith and Mr. Cameron—my grandfather, Mr. Drake."

The men shook hands.

"Well, how be ye enjoying camping out?" Mr. Drake asked.

"Very much," John Smith answered. "Will you have a cigar, Mr. Drake?"

"Don't mind if I do," Mr. Drake admitted. "Them fellers that went out tramping come back yit?"

"No," said Cameron, "but we expect them any day now."

"I walked from Provincetown to Boston when I was a boy once," Mr. Drake confided. "But I must confess, I ain't much on walking. Sea-faring men most gen'ally ain't. Still I remember——" He plunged into reminiscences.

"Tea's ready," Southward said as he concluded. "Won't you wait and have a cup of tea with us, grandfather?"

"Not in them little cups," replied Mr. Drake with some of Southward's forthright scorn, "I'd jess as soon drink out of thimbles."

Southward laughed. "Well, go in the house and get a bowl," she defied him.

"No, I got some work in the barn I want to do," Mr. Drake put her off. "Besides I don't ever eat between meals." He limped off. It was extraordinary how much strength there was in his animal-like shamble.

Perhaps the two city-men thought of that. At any rate, they paid him the involuntary tribute of watching him out of sight.

"He's the man that did the killing?" Cameron questioned.

"Yes, and five years ago, he almost did another," said Southward. "Oh, he's got the Drake temper, all right," she added proudly. "You've got to handle him with gloves."

Dwight Cameron looked at her with all his temperamental arrogance flaring in his face—as though she had challenged him. "Have you got it?" he asked.

"You betchu!" Southward answered with fervour.

"You haven't got any such thing, Southward," Hester asserted indignantly, "you're the sweetest-tempered person I ever knew."

"You've never seen it, Hester, that's all," Southward explained.

"I'd love to see it," Cameron interpolated.

"Easiest exhibition I give," Southward laughed. "Oh, thank you, Charlotte."

Charlotte had come padding slowly across the grass, a plate of cookies, done up in a napkin, in her hand. She made no sound. The men turned. They stared for a paralysed instant before they arose.

The sun had come out white; clear and gold, it poured down upon her. Charlotte was big. She was powerful. Her eyes showed their blindness; yet they were fathomless, rutilant. They were sunk above greyish ruts that years of sleeplessness had seared half-way down her cheeks and below splay eyebrows that locked over her nose in a double arch. Her hair was a black jungle. Thick coarse locks beat down over her forehead and caught their claws in her neck. A brown mole on one cheek seemed to accent this hairiness. Her skin was dead; her figure was set.

Southward's face softened. "My cousin, Miss Howes," she said tenderly and proudly. "Mr. Cameron and Mr. Smith, Charlotte." Charlotte produced two awkward bows, but apparently words were

beyond the scope of her embarrassment. "If you need more cookies, Southward, I'm keeping them hot. I'll bring them out to you." She departed.

"Your aunt is not stone blind?" Smith inquired.

"No. She sees the outlines of things."

"How long has this been?"

"Since she was about twenty-eight."

"Poor soul!" Smith said compassionately. "Poor creature!" The pleasant look that filmed his eyes melted; the sombreness underneath blazed up to the surface. Then, "How did you happen to be called Southward?" He was obviously changing the subject.

"It's been a family-name for three generations," Southward explained. "My grandmother was Southward and her mother. My great, great, great-grandfather gave his first daughter that name. Sentiment was mixed up with it. It had something to do with an early love-affair. For some reason or other, he always preferred to sail southward. That's very different from grandfather——" She nodded her head in the direction Mr. Drake had taken. "When he was a boy, he went into the Arctic Circle and he's crazy to go again—says he will too sometime before he dies. Most girls hate their names but I've always liked mine." She paused, pushed the cups one at a time, under the faucet of the samovar, filled them, served her guests to sugar, cream, cookies, all with deft efficient motions that took the least possible time. Her hands moved so quickly that they seemed positively to flutter and yet they always achieved their errands with movements that, analysed, consisted only of direct advance and retreat. "Hester hates her name."

"Who wouldn't hate Hester Etta?" Hester asked.

"I like Hester very much," John Smith put in.

"When anybody says Southward Drake," Southward continued, "I always see a ship with all sails set beating against a storm." There rippled into her voice a sudden thrill. "I take it as an omen that I'm going to travel sometime."

John Smith put down his pipe and drank his tea in one or two decisive movements. He pulled out a cigarette-case of tortoiseshell. He offered it dumbly to Cameron; the latter dumbly spurned it. Smith picked out a cigarette for himself, lighted it. He sat there meditatively listening to the conversation.

Meanwhile the sun came out of the cloud; the day boiled white. The light ran down the boughs of the old trees; it streamed down the tree-trunks. It dripped from the ends of the leaves to the

grass; it trickled between stems along the ground. It fused with the shadows until the depths faded out of things. The leaves grew transparent; they melted to a green, more soft, more delicate. The lush grass turned pale as beryl. The under sides of the foliage showed glaucous. Near, there lay the faint green of early apples. Far stretched bands of shining aqua-marine. The light beat into the atmosphere, flattened it, thinned it. It grew luminous. It was no longer like an emerald; it was a bubble, sun-shot. More and more tenuous, the bubble grew. It burst floating in filmy strips. Stabbing through leaf-interstices, the sun laid the floor of the orchard with flakes of glittering gold. And ever back of this, the old house glimmered silver white and grey, velvety; peacock blue and green, lustrous.

Smith's eyes went at intervals into the globular depths of the old trees, but these forays were infrequent and brief. Often his gaze, luminous under a perpendicular frown, went from Southward's vivid face to Hester's dreamy one. Cameron had scarcely removed his eyes from Southward since he sat down.

"I like your name too, Miss Drake," Smith said as Southward concluded. "May I call you Southward?"

"Certainly." Southward gave him an amused, oblique glance.

"And may I call you Hester?" John Smith turned.

"If you wish," Hester faltered. And she blushed. Her blush was cataclysm. A thick murky colour flooded her skin, ran under it, ran over it. It hung there a while like a cloud; it actually obscured her expression.

"This country must be full of wonderful stories, Southward," Dwight Cameron said easily. "It's always been a sea-captain's country."

"It is full of them," Southward agreed. "We can tell—Hester and I—more stories than you can shake a stick at. That's our quarrel with it—that once it was so exciting and splendid and romantic. And now—so dull and dead. Hester and I can remember only the tail-end of the wonderful period, but we've heard people talk about it all our lives. Why, when our mothers were little girls, sea-captains were as thick as blueberries. They said that when the ships came home, the village parties would be the most wonderful things. And picturesque! The women would all blossom out in the most extraordinary clothes, such beautiful embroidered crêpe shawls, such pongees and peñas, such necklaces and fans! And then the furniture in the houses; bamboo and teak. And china—oh, the china. Tell them about your china, Hester."

"Oh, it isn't anything special," Hester said. "Only we have one closet, piled high with Canton Medallion—three sets—two hundred pieces to the set. It hasn't been disturbed in my lifetime. But, that isn't anything. When Southward cleaned out her garret, two or three years ago, we found three barrels of Lowestoft that had never been unpacked."

"And as for vases and boxes and queer Oriental truck of all descriptions, you ought to see what I dug out," Southward continued.

"But after all, these are only *things*," Hester burst in. "You should hear some of the tales of mutiny and torture and death on the high seas—the legends of the whaling days. Why, in my great-grandfather's time, the men of Shayneford knew the ports of the Orient and the Mediterranean as they knew their pockets. They could not get about in Boston, and New York was absolutely unknown territory. But they carried the entire map of the other side of the world in their minds."

The blush of Hester's embarrassment had died down and now a different emotion put another blush in its place. This was delicate; a slow filmy pink tide in her cheek. With it came a deep, soft gleam to her eyes.

Cameron's look kindled too. Suddenly he jumped up and began pacing up and down the orchard. "Good Lord! what material!" he ejaculated. "Promise me, Southward, and you too, Hester——" He reeled off their names glibly as though he had always said them. "—that you'll tell me everything you can remember of it. By George, I'm going to start a note-book."

"Hetter's better than I am," Southward said. "She remembers a great deal more—she's always been more interested. But still I'm interested too. We've remembered it because all our lives we've cursed the fate that made us members of this generation. You see the travel-instinct is in our blood. Dozens of sea-going ancestry have left us that inheritance. Hester and I vowed last night we'd go round the world together just as soon as we could pull loose from this hole."

"What keeps you here?" John Smith demanded.

"Responsibilities," Southward answered evasively.

"I see." John Smith threw aside his cigarette-end, pulled a tortoise-shell cigar-case from his pocket, offered it dumbly to Cameron who dumbly spurned it, extracted a cigar, lighted it, proceeded to give the situation luminous attention.

He was calm, but Cameron, striding violently up and down the orchard and pulling violently at his expired pipe, was still wide-

eyed and fiery-eyed. "Start now and tell us some yarns," he begged. "I'll eat up every word of them."

The sun went into retirement behind a cloud that ultimately merged with oncoming twilight. The light ran into the earth; shadow took its place, crepuscular, vitreous. The orchard seemed to turn into some strange under-sea country, the people in it to dimly-seen mer-creatures. The house retreated into the shadow.

With the help of Hester's reinforcing detail, Southward told stories of Shayneford.

"Well," Dwight Cameron said to John Smith as they walked back from Long Lanes to their camp. "Perhaps you don't realise it, John. If not, I'm telling you. This is the star-romance of my life. Wasn't that situation a wonder—the beautiful old house, decaying on its terraces like a gentlewoman who prefers to starve in solitude rather than mingle with the *canaille*? And that pippin of a girl—so wise, so straight from the shoulder, so dead onto anything."

"Yes. I get all that," John Smith agreed. "And more. For, apparently, it's a house of the dead—the crippled grandfather, the blind aunt, and then you must remember that there's an invisible paralytic concealed somewhere on the premises—remember, Manning told us about her?"

"Sure!" Cameron answered absently. "I remember. And then," he went on eagerly, "in contrast with that dead-house atmosphere, that girl's energy, initiative, audacity, and dash. It certainly has set the wheels going round for me. By God, I'd like to write a novel to-night!"

"Why don't you start it?" Smith queried.

"I believe I will. And I'm going to keep a note-book. Southward's talk is full of dope. She's one of those women—there are so few of them—whose talk stirs the creative machinery."

"See here, Dwight," Smith remonstrated, "remember she's a country-girl. And you're not a marrying man."

"Don't get scared, John," Dwight said. "If you don't know it and haven't guessed it I'll tell you now. I always play fair with women. By the way, what do you think of Miss Crowell—Hester?"

"I think she's the more interesting of the two because——" Smith hesitated.

"Because she's so much to be pitied." Dwight finished it for him. "John, you're a scream. You can be depended on inevitably to pick the wall-flower." He threw his arm affectionately over Smith's shoulder. "You damned old fool, if I didn't like you

so much, I'd tell you what I think of that yellow Christian Endeavour streak that's in you. Now don't hit me," he ended in a note of burlesque entreaty. "Even if you haven't licked anybody for nearly a week, I'm not strong enough to take you on yet."

CHAPTER III

IN the garret all the lamps and candles were going. Southward, arrayed in her prince's coat, sat on the couch, a book in her hand. But although she turned the pages at regular intervals, her eye kept skidding over their tops, kept fixing on space. At those moments, her expression was so concentrated that her very eye seemed an ear. Suddenly a sound broke, the bass th-th-thrump—th-th-thrump—th-th-thrump of a frog. Southward dropped her book, seized her electric torch, stole silently into the ell. She stood in the parlour an instant, her head bent, the torch pouring a circle of watery light onto the carpet. Came all the accustomed sounds of sleep, Charlotte's hoarse breathing, Mrs. Drake's falsetto whistling, Mr. Drake's bass rumble. Southward tiptoed back to the entrance of the main house, opened the door gently, stepped in.

When she returned, Dwight Cameron accompanied her.

She moved silently up the three flights of stairs. Silently he followed her. Once in the garret, "You can make all the noise you want now," she assured him. "It's impossible for them to hear anything below, with two stories between us."

But Dwight made sound of no kind at first. He stood in the centre of the room, staring. "Why, this is a regular place," he commented finally in a dazed voice. "May I look at everything?" he asked after another interval.

"That's what I brought you here for." Southward stretched herself on the *chaise-longue* in her favourite attitude, upright, her feet stretched straight before her, her hands clasped back of her head.

"I don't know where to begin," Dwight admitted. "The whole effect is—and then my eyes keep catching—it's like the set in one of those—it makes me think of the *Arabian Nights*. Lord, I have friends in New York who'd like to see—— It's awful and it's wonderful. Where did you get that stuff?" He pointed to the *crêpe* that covered the walls.

"I found a bale of it when I cleaned up the garret. I suppose somebody brought it from India. I saw some East Indian stuff something like it in Boston once. What for it was brought here I dunno. It was faded and moth-eaten in spots—and mildewed—apparently it has been rained on at some time."

"It's a wonderful colour," Cameron commented. "Amazing! It turns this place into a rajah's quarters. It makes me think of Salome and Salambo and, oh Lord, the Bible and Kipling and Conrad. All this Chinese stuff is sailor-loot, isn't it?"

Southward nodded.

Cameron's reporter-gaze was going everywhere in quick, sharp-glanced dashes. He stopped before a shoal of magazine-cuts, pinned with thumb-tacks on the wall. "Rodin!" he exclaimed, "and post-impressionism!" He surveyed the desk. "Tanagras too!" He began to move about. "Of course you know that all this old furniture is exceptionally good."

"Yes, Hester and I got interested in antiques a while ago. We got some books out of the Library and studied up."

Cameron turned on her a look from which all the sharpness had gone; observation had changed to analysis. "And do you like old stuff yourself?" he asked.

"You ought to have been brought up on haircloth and white marble and jig-sawed oak," Southward answered, "to know how much. You ought to see our downstairs rooms; they're filled with grandmother's stuff. The house looks as though it had been furnished with cigar-coupons." She knitted her brows an instant. "But to be perfectly honest with you—and with myself, which is a great deal more important to me—I don't care the way Hester does. Hester really *loves* old furniture. She feels towards a good old piece as towards a good old person. I don't. I like it because it's simple and in the long run, more fitting and useful. In point of fact, *things* don't make much of a hit with me, I guess."

"I see," said Cameron; but apparently he did not see. He said this in a baffled tone and he moved over to the sideboard and stood staring at it. Obviously his gaze did not focus on the wonder of age-blackened and time-polished surface combined with feathery inlay that met it. For he suddenly whirled on her.

"Do you know how wonderful this all is?" he demanded in a stern voice. "This magnificent old house, this glorious old furniture, that gorgeous Chinese truck—and you?"

"I know perfectly well how wonderful I am," Southward answered equably, "if that helps any."

"Well, you're a new one on me," Dwight almost sighed. "I don't mind confessing that."

"That's flattering from a gentleman of so profound a metropolitan experience," Southward admitted. "Very flattering! I thought New York was just chockful of women who were interesting and different."

"It is," Cameron answered promptly. "It's loaded to the gunwales with them—all original and different in exactly the same way—all imported at a terrific expense from Oshkosh, Canandaigua, Scituate, Oklahoma, and The Needles, every one of them guaranteed to be a Good Sport, a Good Indian, and a Regular Fellow. Why I had forgotten there were girls like you and Miss Crowell; and after all you're the best kind."

"I don't believe that's a conviction," Southward said shrewdly, "it's just a passing state of mind. I could tell better though by seeing you for a minute or two with those Good Indians."

Cameron laughed; there was a little embarrassment in his mirth. "Perhaps you're right," he admitted.

Southward made no further comment. She smiled as with a secret sense of triumph. She sat up, removed her feet from the *chaise-longue* to a footstool, folded her arms by a process of clutching an elbow with each hand. She watched him intently while he studied the names of the books in the secretary.

"Now I'm going to get your number," he announced, in a triumphant tone. He read across one shelf. "*In the Forbidden Land, Farthest North, In Darkest Africa, The Life-Story of Isabel, Lady Burton, Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Earth, Gulliver, Conrad, Wells, Henley.* Good stuff but old stuff! All except Conrad and Wells. And not much variety! What do you like best?"

"Travels of course," she answered. "Even if I hadn't come from sailor-stock, I think I'd like travels best. For you see, I can't get out of this hole myself; so I go by proxy. I've read every book of discovery, exploration, or travel in the Shayneford Library and we have a pretty good little Library as country libraries go. Then after that—well, it depends. I like some fiction—if it has action enough. For years when I was a child I read almost nothing but boys' books—dime novels. I liked them because they had so much doing in them. I still read Jules Verne over and over again and H. G. Wells—those early fairy-tales of his. I like history sometimes—or rather I like some history."

Cameron clapped his hand to his pocket, pulled out a small brown book. "I brought you over a sample of the world's best literature." He threw *Ginger* on the table. "Read it!"

"All right," said Southward. But her voice was unenthusiastic.

"And tell me exactly what you think," he pleaded.

"Oh, I'll do that, all right," Southward promised with her mischievous smile.

"I really want the truth."

"Oh, you'll get it," Southward assured him. "I don't promise you it; I threaten you with it. That's my specialty, telling the truth to men. It'll probably bore me. Most fiction does. That's the worst thing I've discovered about you—that you want to write. I don't believe you're a real writer though."

"You *don't!*" exclaimed Cameron. A note of chagrin lay under the mock indignation of his emphasis. Then he laughed. "Gee, you're a—— Well, you beggar description. Of course you think writing is a high-brow occupation. Go on though—you were saying you liked history sometimes—or some history always—I forget your subtle distinctions."

"I meant I liked a course in history that I took in college. It was the only course that interested me enough——"

Cameron whirled on her again from his survey of the books. "I didn't know that you were a college-girl," he said in a disappointed tone.

"I'm not," Southward promptly reassured him. "Or not entirely one. It's the only blot on an otherwise unblemished career. I thought I was going to be a regular college-girl. And I did go to college for part of one year. But—well, I couldn't stand it."

"Why?"

"Oh, it was so proper and correct and dull. The dormitory life nearly killed me. And then the girls themselves were so silly and giggly and girly. As for the instructors—well, we freshmen were taught mainly by boys. I knew more about practical things than any of them and I think I could have licked one or two. They had thin voices with English accents. One of them wore a monocle. That got on my nerves and Heaven only knows how much I must have shocked them. I couldn't stand it. I quit half-way through the second term of the first year. You see, here I'm free. I'm my own boss. I ride and drive all I want to. And work in the garden. Perhaps it's just as well that I beat it when I did. I'd have had to come home anyway. Grandmother was taken ill immediately afterwards, a stroke of paralysis. There was nobody else but me."

Southward came to an end. There was a little pause of silence. Obviously her mind's eye was on the past; just as obviously but with an odd sense of perplexity, Cameron's was on the present. "You were saying you liked history," he interpolated hastily, as though it were an improvisation to cover thoughts that were taking another tangent.

"Yes—some of it—war, conquest, bloodshed. I like J. Cæsar

pretty well—he was quite all my idea of a man—and N. Bonaparte. I can't make up my mind though which was the bigger crook."

She arose as she spoke and came over to the table. Her quick, efficient hands tossed the paper, magazines, and letters this way and that until she found the cigarettes and ash-trays.

Cameron's tangential thoughts had evidently focused and then broken to greater confusion. "You extraordinary creature!" he said. Then, "I say! where did you get that thing on your head?"

Southward was standing in the light. In addition to her tomato-coloured prince's coat, she wore a high Chinese head-dress—a conglomeration of many coloured silk pompoms, feathers, flowers, streamers of silk trimmed with mirrors. Fringes of pearl hung from her forehead to her very brows.

"Oh, out of the trunk with the other stuff," Southward said indifferently. "I put it on for your benefit. Have a cigarette?" She held out the open box.

"Thanks." Cameron lifted the candle over to her. Southward lighted her cigarette. He lighted his. He put the candle down. His movement swept the papers aside. "Lor-amighty!" he exclaimed lazily. "Where'd that article come from? Is it loaded?"

The "article" was Southward's revolver. "From the West originally," Southward answered lazily, "Lysander Manning gave it to me. Yes, it's loaded." She sent a file of smoke-rings twirling through the space that lay between them.

"Well, it won't be any longer." Cameron broke the revolver, dumped the cartridges onto the table. "Double action!" he commented, "that isn't horse-sense, you've no business to do that."

"Well, you see," Southward explained, "I'm really not quite so rash as it seems. Nobody ever gets up here but Hester. Grandmother can't—she's bedridden. Grandfather can't—it's too stiff a climb for him. And Charlotte can't—she's blind. Come to think of it, there hasn't been a soul in this garret since I fixed it up—except you and Hester. And every time Hester comes, she makes me lock the gun up."

"I see," said Cameron. "So nobody's ever been here but you girls. It's a secret place. That's lovely. It adds to the connotation enormously." His mind reverted. "How'd you ever happen to want a revolver? You surely don't need one in this dopy little town."

"No, not generally. But once a man threatened to kill me. I got the revolver then. I carried it wherever I went—for six months. Then the embargo lifted."

"What lifted it?"

"He married another girl," Southward said with her blue-and-black glimmer.

"I see. Desperate, wasn't he?"

"I had always thought it would be very exciting to be in peril of your life," Southward remarked. "On the contrary—— One of the things that cured him was that occasionally I used to ask him to shoot me rather than bore me to death. My eye, I was glad when he fell in love with that girl."

"Did it surprise you? Wasn't it a sort of shock?"

"No," Southward answered promptly. "I imported her for the purpose."

Cameron laughed immoderately. "Poor devil!" he said. But there was no pity in his voice, only contemptuous patronage. "It must be pretty tough for these country bumpkins to fall in love with you,—it's the moth-and-the-flame proposition all right. And they can't help it of course. You're simply too pretty for any use. By Jove, it's unfair." The banter went out of his voice; his tone became business-like. "Oh, say—one thing—did you ever have to use the gun on that fellow?"

Southward's expression changed. She hesitated.

Cameron's look turned keen—the look of the hunter who has found his prey.

"No." Southward became impassive again. "He was the kind who didn't mean it. You know probably that people who threaten are divided into two classes—the people who mean it and the people who think they do. He wouldn't—he *couldn't* go through with it. I realised that. But it was some time after I'd bought the revolver before I realised it, and I continued to carry it. I liked it."

The hunter's look melted from Cameron's eyes as he listened. The banter came back. "This ought to be a lesson to me," he said. "Remember I told you the other night that whatever you do, you were *not* to let me fall in love with you."

"Didn't I give you my word of honour that I wouldn't do a thing in that direction?" Southward's eyes emitted another blue-and-black gleam at her slangy *double entendre*. "I thought I was taking the best of care of you."

"You are—damn you!" Cameron laughed a little. He sat down, crossed his knees, clasped his hands over them. "But suppose I do fall in love with you in spite of yourself and myself?"

"I'm afraid that's your look-out," Southward said placidly. "I'm not a marrying young woman at all. I don't want

to marry, but I like to flirt. You take care of yourself and I'll take care of myself. A man doesn't interest me at all after I've got him going. Now we're off."

"You say that as though you'd said it many times before. You know there's nothing on earth that would so enchant a man," Cameron commented. "You man-eater!"

Southward's eyes filled with her mischievous smile. "Well, please remember no man could possibly loathe and dread the thought of matrimony as much as I do. For no matter how bad it is for a man, it is infinitely worse for a woman. Marriage is my idea of solitary confinement for life. But then again," and now Southward's lids fell over the mirth in her eyes; the light of that mirth seemed almost to shine through them. "If you must fall in love with somebody, you could hardly do better than to fall in love with me. For I wouldn't marry you or any other man I've ever heard of—with the exception of royalty. And I'll put that in writing if you require it."

Cameron smiled but not with his former enthusiasm. "Why this prejudice in favour of royalty?" he queried.

"I rather think I'd like a queen's job," Southward said. "I like power. I like to run things."

"How about an American multi-millionaire. Wouldn't he offer you power enough?"

"Not unless he bought me a kingdom somewhere. No, matrimony is not for me."

"Nor lovers," Cameron suggested. He was serious now. The analytic look had returned to his eyes.

"Ah, that's different altogether," Southward said. "No, I don't care how many lovers I have. I don't mind confessing to you—as one as equally intent on evading matrimony as I—that I like lovers. I feel a little uncomfortable if there isn't something of the sort. It keeps me jollied up. It gives a sort of excitement to life. I suppose the root of it is that, although I don't want to marry, I like to think that I *can*. That's rather cheap, isn't it?" She turned on him suddenly with one of her engaging self-accusals. "And so, although I'm perfectly fair with men, I don't drive them from my presence—or anything like it. Have another?"

"Thanks, I will." Cameron came over to her side on the *chaise-longue*. He accepted the cigarette which she offered but he rejected the match which she lighted with a rasp of her finger-nail across the phosphorus. He leaned coolly over and secured a light from her own cigarette. It was a sudden movement and brought

their faces close. Southward did not stir; she did not even wink. And when, the end glowing, he withdrew his cigarette, she emitted a tranquil flood of smoke-rings.

"Would you like to come to New York?" he asked suddenly.

"Would a duck swim?" was Southward's answer.

"What really keeps you here?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking—nothing. But in another manner of speaking—everything. They're all so helpless—grandmother, grandfather, and even Charlotte, who's my especial responsibility. I'd feel like an awful mucker to go off and leave them."

"Couldn't you put some responsible person in charge?"

"Nothing short of a trained nurse," Southward answered. "And even that would be hardly fair—besides being too expensive. My conscience—I have plenty of conscience as far as they are concerned—would bother me."

Cameron considered the end of his cigarette, scowling. "But you could come in the winter for an occasional few days' visit, couldn't you?"

"I could manage that," Southward said. "In fact I did once."

"All right," Cameron concluded. "Then you're coming to New York next winter. I'll rip the town open from Grant's Tomb to the Battery. I promise to show you what makes it tick."

Southward's eyes flared but her voice was calm enough. "My answer is *yes*."

"New York really is a wonderful city," Cameron went on. "I'd like to show you some places that——" He came to the end of his cigarette and lighted another, at the candle this time. And suddenly his mood changed. The reporter-look, swift, deep, acute, left his eyes. With it disappeared his air of analytic examination. Rather slowly at first and a little dreamily, he began to talk about New York. He gave her his first impression, the sneering, jeering article that, on the very day of his arrival, he had written and sold all in one day to a magazine. Then he described the change in his attitude, the growth of a fascinated interest, a real affection. He had the reporter's conciseness of narrative, crispness of phrase, articulateness. Southward made no comment. She did not speak. She scarcely seemed to breathe. Then lapsing by an imperceptible hiatus from general statements to concrete facts, he began to retail various adventures. He had brake-beamed his way across the continent; he had worked his passage on a cattle-ship across the ocean. He had lived in Mexico. There tumbled from his lips a jumble of wild experiences—San

Francisco, Chicago, New York, Paris, all shot with side-lights from his assignments.

Southward made no comment.

Then suddenly he appeared to run down. "I seem to have spilled it all out," he commented, smiling in rather a shamefaced way.

Southward's only answer was a sigh. She sat staring ahead, lost to the present. Cameron stared ahead too—but it was as though he was trying to remember something. Suddenly the look of the hunter came back to his eyes.

"Oh, tell me," he demanded. "I asked you before but you switched off onto something. Have you ever used the gun on anybody?"

Southward hesitated.

"Oh, tell me about it," he wheedled, "I know it wasn't that idiot."

"No," Southward said. "It wasn't." She meditated coolly for a moment. "I *will* tell you about it, I think. You'll be the only person who knows. And I'd like to have an outside opinion. Especially if it was worth something. It happened that time—the only time—I went over to New York."

"Go on," Cameron encouraged her.

"I had been carrying the gun about with me for a year and so I took it with me."

"How'd you carry it?"

"They were wearing waists and skirts then. I made an amateur holster where my waist hung full in front. I don't realise to this day how nobody ever saw it, but apparently nobody ever did. I had no idea I'd use it in New York, of course. Still I was going to be alone there. The family didn't know where I was. They thought I was in Boston. The only person I told was Lysander Manning. Well, I stayed at a place that had been recommended to me—a semi-charitable institution which charges women who are strangers in the city a merely nominal price for rooms—the Susannah Retreat."

Cameron nodded. "I know all about that. Go on!"

"They had only one bed left when I got there. That was in the room with another woman. I didn't mind that. She was a Mrs. Reynolds. I didn't pay any attention to her at first—she made no impression on me. But inevitably of course you get to know the woman who's your room-mate. And she made so many advances and such kind ones that it would have been hard to ignore them. She dressed well. She seemed to have a lot of money

and she knew all about New York. She offered to take me about the shops and she said she could get free tickets at some of the theatres. I wanted to go—and we went to see Forbes-Robertson in *Hamlet*. She paid for those tickets, it happened—two dollars and a half apiece. And in view of subsequent developments,” Southward’s eyes glimmered, “it has always been a matter of satisfaction to me that I made her sit through *Hamlet*. I realised afterwards how, in the cleverest way in the world, she had learned all about me. Her system was to pretend timidity—she was as timid as a mouse about everything. So naturally, to prove what my courage was like, I told her that I was all alone in New York and with no friends in the city and that my people—I threw this out one day in the spirit of bravado—did not know where I was. I even lied a little, I said *nobody* knew where I was. She affected to be much concerned about that; urged me to write my family; threatened to write them herself. Of course she didn’t do that. Nor did I. All the time, she was complimenting me on my courage, my wonderful, my amazing, my extraordinary courage. Did I fall for it? You should have seen me. I ate it up. And I continued to brag. She told me a good deal about herself. She had been away for July and was now getting her house ready to live in—a house in the forties somewhere. She telephoned constantly from our room to the servants who were putting it in order and gave the most convincing directions to them. She was so easily frightened that she did not like to go to a hotel. That was why she came to the Susannah. She felt perfectly safe there.”

“What did she look like?” Cameron asked.

“Tall—exceedingly thin—not striking-looking at all—yellow hair a natural colour—blue eyes—rather strange eyes—they reminded me of the eyes of the only spiritualistic medium I’ve ever seen in my life. She had a good deal of style, but she dressed quietly—no make-up of any description.”

“Did you like her?”

“Yes and no. I liked the way she had of seeming to mind her own business. Then she was a good fellow. And all that sort of thing. She could talk about anything. She’d travelled quite a bit apparently. And she knew New York—every hole and corner of it—especially about the stage—actors and actresses—the society people whose pictures you see in the paper—she told me reams of gossip about them. She pointed some of them out on the street and of course that interested me a lot. Still afterwards I realised that back in my mind there was always a question. I didn’t

entirely like her. I didn't wholly trust her. But it was so vague and weak—that feeling—that I really was not conscious of it. I don't know what it was exactly—as if there was a wall I had never scaled. But I was enormously entertained and exceedingly flattered. She took no notice of anybody else at the Susannah—Still that feeling——”

Southward stopped and knit her brows. With eyes downcast and one hand rumpling her hair, she considered this psychological problem. “I'm not very intuitive,” she remarked.

“Please go on,” Cameron urged her.

“Well, one day she said that her house was all ready and suggested that I go up and see it. I said I would. It was the day I was leaving. I had my suit-case, all packed, intending to go from her house to the train. I was delighted to do this; for of course I hadn't seen the inside of a New York house. It was an awful day. You know that wilting New York heat——”

Cameron nodded.

“After we'd walked a bit, she began to get faint and suggested a taxi. I signalled to one; we got in. She leaned back, closed her eyes. She had smelling-salts and things and I had to fuss over her so long that I didn't notice how we went or where we went. In fact I paid no attention to anything but her. When we got out, I didn't even know what street it was or whether it was east or west. All I got was a long block of brownstone houses, as alike as peas in a pod, and exactly like another long block opposite. It never occurred to me of course to look at the number. All I can recall is that the curtains were down all over the house. I had to help her up the front steps. There were two doors, a vestibule between. She gave me her keys and I opened both doors. I stepped into the hall, helping her all the time. She shut the door and recovered from her faintness,” Southward emitted a quick crisp snap from between her thumb and middle finger, “like that! It came to me where I was—in an instant.”

“God!” Cameron whispered this. And then in a normal tone. “What put you wise?”

“I don't know,” Southward answered directly. “I didn't know then and I don't know now. I saw only the hall and part of one big long room red and gold. It all looked very gorgeous to a country-girl like me. No, I don't know how I knew. But I did. Perhaps it was the pictures. They were far from restrained in character—and rather vulgarly executed. I turned to her. Her hand was still on the knob. She looked at me and I looked at her and we understood each other in an instant. ‘I guess I'll

go,' I said. 'I guess you won't,' she answered. And oh, Lord, the difference in her! Those vague dull eyes of hers were like stones. And her face had changed so. It wasn't human really—not excited, you understand, but just hard like a rock. The strange thing about it was that we talked in whispers, although the house seemed as quiet as a tomb. It was all over in a moment though. I can remember every word. Next I said, 'Open the door or I'll make you.' Then she said, 'The hell you will! How are you going to make me?' Just then I heard footsteps. I turned. A man was coming up the stairs from the basement, just turning into the hall. He was little and thin and dark—and he had a look—well, as if he'd been put in an oven and baked. I noticed that his hair was very smooth—oiled—that his tie and handkerchief and stockings were all the same shade of lavender. His eyes glittered and yet they were as hard as hers. I don't know how to express it but he had a kind of attractiveness. He looked strong too; he had the quality of steel that I like in people. He came straight towards me as though he was expecting me. 'She's a peach all right,' he said in the most business-like way as though I was a horse. 'I'll manage her, Myrtle. You hold the door.' I put my hand into my waist and pulled out the gun. 'Stand where you are,' I said. I have to hand it to him; he had his courage with him. He kept right on coming. 'She won't shoot,' he said in a perfectly calm voice to Myrtle. And in fact, for an instant, I almost didn't. That absolute assurance of his hypnotised me. I respect that man when I think of him. I hate him, but I respect him. Perhaps I wouldn't have shot—if Myrtle hadn't reached over my shoulder and tried to grab the gun. Then something inside me exploded—the Drake temper all right. I felt on fire with rage. I pulled the trigger. He dropped in the queerest kind of way. You know how they do it in the moving-pictures, face forward, arms outstretched, after a melodramatic spasm. He didn't do it that way. He didn't fall at all. He just crumpled in a leisurely sort of way, twisted and sank in a huddle that looked more like a bundle of clothes than anything. Then I turned the gun on her! 'Open the door, Myrtle!' I said. 'You damned boob!' she answered—we still talked in whispers and that pistol-shot hadn't produced a sound in the house—'if you've killed him, I'll cut your heart out.' But she opened the door and I went out. I searched the papers for days and days but I never saw one word about it. To this day, I don't know whether I killed him or not." Her face changed as she contemplated a mental picture. "Sometimes I'm awfully afraid I didn't."

Cameron sighed. "What a story!" he said. "What a story!" Then in a purely professional tone: "What did you do immediately afterwards?"

"I walked over to Broadway and bought a comb and a toothbrush. Everything I had was in my suit-case. And that was in the taxi and the taxi had disappeared when I got out. I went right over to the Grand Central, and came over to Boston on the ten o'clock limited. Shayneford looked pretty good to me for nearly three months. It's the only time it ever has looked good to me."

"Didn't it leave any other trace—that experience?" Cameron asked.

"I had dreams for a while," Southward answered briefly. "Every night—hundreds of them—they were pretty bad."

"Love of Mike!" Cameron sighed again, "what a story! If you read it in a book—say," his look became analytic again. "Do you know when you said you were afraid you hadn't killed him, you had a fighting face—just like a pug? It made a different person of you."

"Well, you see," Southward said tranquilly, "that I tell you the truth when I inform you that I have the Drake temper. And now, my dear young friend, it's eleven o'clock. I'll have to turn you out."

"All right," Cameron agreed. "What a story!"

Southward lighted him down the stairs, accompanied him to the jetty where his boat lay.

CHAPTER IV

THE tea-table was set under the big horse-chestnut tree. Hester stood off a little way and studied the effect of the old white hexagonal china with the prim bunches of purple-lustre flowers, the big, low pewter bowl massed deep with nasturtiums, the thin, shining, dented spoons. A pleased look came into her face as though she saw these commonplaces of her home in a new aspect; and her pleasure brought a little colour to her cheeks, a gleam in her eyes. She stood for an instant contemplating them.

"I never saw anything so foolish in my life."

Hester started violently. Her mother had come noiselessly across the grass, was standing by her side.

"Having teas out here with all the flies and mosquitoes," Mrs. Crowell continued in a caustic voice. "It would be much nicer in the dining-room, with the table all set up pretty."

Mrs. Crowell spoke, in spite of her causticity, in what was for her a preoccupied manner. There was an abnormal air of excitement about her. Something smouldered behind the apathetic grey of her eyes. Her lips, pulling more tautly than usual over her glistening white teeth, were a brilliant scarlet.

"But it's so much prettier out of doors, mother. And both Mr. Smith and Mr. Cameron enjoy it so much. You see they live in the city most of the time. The reason they're camping out is because they want to be in the open as much as possible."

"Is that Mr. Smith waiting on you?"

"Mother! Of course not."

"I just asked. Mary Meade said yesterday that Sarah Wallis told her she wondered if you'd get him."

"Well—you can tell Mary that I—that I'm not trying to get him. But there, don't say anything; they won't believe that."

"No," her mother repeated softly, "they won't believe *that*."

She looked at her daughter critically. Then she sighed with impatience. "For goodness' sake, do go and do your hair over again. It looks as though you'd combed it with a pitchfork. I never did see anybody so careless as you are, Hester, about your personal appearance. If you were a beauty, you could afford to be that way. But seeing you're far from that, I'd try to look neat at least."

Hester bit her lips. "All right, mother. I'll do it again." She went slowly to her room, stood for an instant, looking at herself in the glass. Apparently she had made some effort to soften her hair about her face; it waved in loose tendrils on her forehead. But one by one, she pulled out her long silver hairpins, plastered her hair down flat with her comb, rewound her braid.

"How does it look now, mother?" she asked when she came downstairs.

Her mother's glance just grazed her. "Well, it'll do," she admitted. "But that's about all. It's curious how unlucky you are, Hester. The only thing you *have* got that's pretty, you've got altogether too much of. Now all that hair doesn't do you a bit of good, especially as you haven't the slightest knack in putting it up. Beyond a certain amount, hair isn't pretty—it's homely. I wish you'd watch how other women do their hair and copy them."

"I'll try to remember, mother." Hester's eyes had slowly emptied of their light; as slowly her cheeks had drained of their colour. All the hollows and shadows in her contours seemed to start into prominence; her profile showed bleak. "Somehow," she added listlessly, "I almost wish they weren't coming."

"Well, you *would* have them," Mrs. Crowell said. "I told you you didn't know how to entertain folks. Perhaps the next time, you'll be guided by my advice. You never talk, you know. Well, thank heavens, Southward can. You can be sure she'll wear the right clothes and do her hair the most becoming way. She's—There! Here they are now! Lord, doesn't Southward look pretty?"

Southward did, it happened, present every possible contrast to Hester as, laughing and talking, she came through the orchard between the two men. The sun was pouring through the trees onto them; but it brought with it, like drift on a current, the shadows of the leaves. It was as though she walked under a perpetual cataract which moved with her—a cataract in which golden light, honey-thick, joined with steely shadow sharply-edged. The shadow could not dim the brilliant blue gleams in her dark eyes; nor could the sunshine find a flaw in the metallic lustre of her brown skin.

"How do you do, Mrs. Crowell," she said pleasantly, and while Hester greeted the two men, she stood laughing and talking. Mrs. Crowell looked at her with that reluctant enjoyment with which middle-aged women often viewed Southward's beauty—an enjoy-

ment subconsciously fought against, but almost pagan in its intensity.

Hester introduced Cameron and Smith to her mother. They sat down at the little table and Hester served tea. As an afterthought, apparently, she went into the house and returned, Tabby trailing her, with the basket of kittens. She set the four woolly puffs of down on the grass. For a while, the party entertained themselves by watching the little half-blind, squeaking creatures drag their straight-pointed tails over the grass in a futile effort to find their mother. Tabby took herself off for a little distance and lay luxuriously unencumbered, stretching her long lean body and sharpening her claws on a tree-trunk. After an interval, she consented to rejoin her offspring and settled philosophically down to their frantic pulling at her nipples.

Mrs. Crowell went into the house and returned with the afghan that she was knitting. Silent, heavy, her eyelids down, she might have been a wax figure but for the constant interweaving of her fingers. Occasionally her glance came up, surveyed the group playing with the kittens; it stayed longest on Smith. He turned to her after a while.

"I'm quite in love with Shayneford, Mrs. Crowell," he remarked. "Have you always lived here?"

"You might almost say I had," Mrs. Crowell replied. "I was brought up in Boston, but I used to come here every summer when I was a child. I was twenty when I married Mr. Crowell. He'd always lived here and I've lived here ever since."

"I suppose you love Shayneford then," Smith ventured.

Mrs. Crowell did not raise her voice or her eyes. "I hate it," she said.

Smith made no comment for an instant. And in that instant his eyes went to Hester, listening dully to a spirited contest of wits between Southward and Cameron, came back to her mother's stony mask. "Is it Shayneford," he said, "or because you don't like the country?"

"Both," Mrs. Crowell answered evenly. "I despise Shayneford. But I don't like the country and I don't like country-life. And I don't like country-folks. They don't like me. Everybody in this town hates me and I'm sure I return their feeling with interest. I love the city and city-life—noise, folks passing, something to do any time you want to do it, music and the theatre. At least, I used to care once. I don't think much of it now. I'm too old to care for anything."

"What a life!" Smith commented. "How many years?"

"Thirty!" Mrs. Crowell answered.

"Gee whiz!" Smith murmured, "why don't you go to the city?" he demanded.

"Oh, I don't care any more," Mrs. Crowell reiterated, "I want to die here. I'm too old to care."

"We're never too old to care," Smith said. "In fact, I think the older we get, the more we care." His quick glance went to her moveless, sphynx-like face as though for sympathy. None came; she did not lift her eyelids. "Do you like to meet city-people, Mrs. Crowell?"

"I don't know that I care particularly one way or the other," Mrs. Crowell replied in her dead tone.

"I was going to say that if you did, we could offer you some." He turned to include Southward and Hester in his announcement. "Our party is going to be increased by five to-morrow—three women and two men."

For an instant, nobody spoke. And in that instant, Southward, who was facing the road, bowed and smiled. Involuntarily, the others turned. Pearl Wallis—very slim and pretty, in a pink muslin—was walking towards the beach with Lysander Manning. Manning's impersonal glance, following his bow, ran through the group on the lawn without a change of expression, but Pearl's gaze, obviously curious, seemed to catch on every detail. Under cover of this diversion, Mrs. Crowell shot two quick looks across the table, one at her daughter, another at Smith. "Tell us about them," Southward commanded idly.

"The men are Morena O'Reilly and Ripley Fearing who are returning from their tramp down the Cape. The women are New York friends of ours, one Mrs. Boardman, two, her daughter, Mrs. Morrow, three, Miss Edith Hale. Mrs. Boardman is elderly, she deals in antiques, and every year she goes to Europe on a collecting tour—rather handsome. Her daughter—we often call her 'The Princess'—is a picturesque person, running over with life, clever, diabolically clever. She's a widow. Her husband was a great traveller and she's lived all over the world. Miss Hale is young, too, not so full of vitality as Mrs. Morrow, quiet, very attractive though. I think you'll like them all."

Over Southward's brilliant eyes there had dropped a curtain of reserve. Now her lids fell over that wary film. "Tell us about the men," she said lazily to Dwight.

"Morena O'Reilly is almost as picturesque as Mrs. Morrow," Dwight answered. "Half Dogan and half Spanish. War-correspondent. We call him 'the Mick' some of the time and 'the

Bull-fighter' the rest. He's lived everywhere and written about it. Mrs. Morrow picked him up somewhere in her travels, got him to come to New York. Handsome beggar! Not too handsome though. Some athlete, believe me. Fearing's the best fellow on earth."

"Oh, yes, I remember," Southward interpolated, "a reformer."

"That's the way I felt about it at first," Dwight reassured her. "But he's a Regular Fellow in every sense of the word—keeps his deadly occupation a dark secret. I'm strong for Rip. You'll like him."

"Rip's a big person," John struck in vigorously. "New England—old family—Harvard. After he came out of college he began to paint and he painted darn well. I've seen some of his things. Suddenly something happened—I don't know what—*nobody* knows what for that matter. He started a magazine called *The Negro Woman*. It's an obscure publication. Nobody sees it. But in it for fifteen years, Rip's fought the black woman's fight. Somebody asked him once why he did that and he said the negro-woman was the under-dog of the world. On the whole," John finished slowly, "he's the best person I know."

Nobody spoke for a moment. Then, "*Lord!*" Southward exclaimed, "I should say he was."

Southward who had come to spend the evening with Hester chattered on indifferent subjects until the two men disappeared up the road. Then, "Two New York women!" she interrupted herself suddenly. "Hester, we're up against it."

Hester laughed a laugh that had no mirth in it. "I'm always up against it. I don't mind of course, except that I'm scared to death. People of that kind who've been everywhere and seen everything frighten me almost out of my senses. But you don't mind them, Southward. I've yet to see the girl who can compete with you."

"Well, just between ourselves," Southward admitted, "so have I. But my Waterloo's got to come sometime, Hester. Maybe it's now." She paused and her boyish smile flickered brilliantly across her lips. It was obvious that she herself did not believe that that time had come. "Anyhow, I'll give them a run for their money."

CHAPTER V

SOUTHWARD had gone home long ago. Mrs. Crowell sat on one side of the hexagonal table, knitting her afghan. Hester sat on the other side reading. There had not been a word spoken for an hour.

"Too bad about those New York women coming," Mrs. Crowell broke the silence suddenly. Her voice was toneless as ever, her handsome face set.

Hester raised unsuspecting inquiring eyes. "Too bad!" she repeated. "Well, I thought so at first. I'm always so scared of new people. But I got over that as I talked with Southward. It seems rather interesting to me now." She closed the book over her forefinger, looked up at her mother with the air of one who anticipates pleasant talk.

"Well, I suppose you realise," Mrs. Crowell's voice had a measured quality as of one saying something mentally rehearsed. She stopped to unknot her worsted, "that it won't be any further use for you to set your cap for John Smith. I could see by the way he talked of Edith Hale that he was dead in love with her."

"Mother!" Hester leaped to her feet. The book slapped on the floor. "What do you mean—setting my cap—— You ought to know me better than to think that I—— I'm ashamed to discuss it."

"Well, I ain't," her mother said tranquilly, not bothering to look at her, "and don't try to pretend with me. I know what you are, root and branch. I've seen what you've been up to. So has everybody else in Shayneford that ain't blind. You and Southward are both trying to get those two men. Sarah Wallis asked me yesterday if he was waiting on you. Southward'll probably succeed. She's smart enough to do anything, besides being pretty and knowing how to dress. But of course you'd pick out a man that was crazy about another woman. You're bound to do that."

"Well, you are mistaken." By an effort Hester quieted the excitement in her voice. "And all Shayneford is mistaken. It has never entered my head to think of Mr. Smith from that point of view. I don't consider any man from that point of

view. I never have. I don't think well enough of myself. Whether he's engaged or married to any other woman makes no difference to me."

"Yes, it looks like that!" Mrs. Crowell sneered, but it was still in a voice of dead steel. "Then what's all this fussing before the glass for? What does all this pulling your hair away soft on your forehead mean and dressing up with the neck of your waist turned away? Why you do it with such a thin neck is beyond me. Why are you dragging out all the old lace in the house and fixing it on your dresses if you aren't setting your cap for him? I see a good deal more, miss, than you give me credit for."

"*Mother!*" An emotion fairly maniacal burst through Hester's expression. She looked wildly about her. "Mother, if you——" But in the midst of her fury, a sudden resolution caught her. She strode out of the house.

She walked at a furious rate straight up the quiet star-lit road, on and on past houses until they came at rare intervals and then not at all; on and on until the road grew narrow, grew wild, grew black with interarching boughs; and still on and on. Then her stride relaxed. She stopped suddenly, leaned against a tree-trunk. She sobbed and her sobs shook her like a sirocco. Gradually they died down, the long breathy catches in her breathing smoothed out. She sank on the moss at the foot of the pine and lay there quiescent for a long time.

"Well," a voice exclaimed suddenly, "I've caught up with you at last. I've been five minutes at it. I saw you pass the Twombly road." It was Smith's voice and the clear light of his electric torch beat relentlessly on her swollen bloated face. "Oh, I beg your pardon!" He turned the light away. "What is it? What can I do?"

For an instant, Hester shook with a fresh and fiercer paroxysm. Her voice strangled in her throat. Then with a tremendous effort, she stiffened and quieted. "Thank you, Mr. Smith. There is nothing that you can—I'm a little upset over something."

"Are you going anywhere in particular?" he asked.

"No."

"Then suppose we walk. Unless you'd rather sit and be quiet. Perhaps you'd rather be alone. Shall I go?"

"I—I—I don't know," Hester answered wanly. "Yes, I think I'll walk. No—don't go."

"We won't talk if you don't want to talk," Smith went on. "Or I'll do all the talking. Or I'll listen to you."

Hester did not reply and they walked for a long while in silence.

It was a still night, moonless but full of stars. Nothing moved near, except a firefly vibrating through the dark or a moth-miller thudding noiselessly against them. Afar, a star occasionally broke away from the vast piles that lay everywhere in the sky, and shot with a long silent silvery hiss to the horizon. Nothing sounded near or far but their feet, padding the dusty road. Smith lighted his pipe, puffed quietly. His left hand threw the light of the torch before them.

"I guess I'll tell you about it," Hester said at last, in a spent voice. "Nobody knows it all. Southward has guessed a little. I can't tell her everything. She's too close to it. It seems a disloyalty to talk it over with her. But you're so far away—you're like a passing ship. Somehow I *can* tell you."

"It's your mother," Smith declared as she paused.

"Yes, it's my mother."

"I got that this afternoon," Smith volunteered.

"I felt that you did," Hester said simply. "You see I'm a disappointment to her. I've always been a disappointment. She was a great beauty when she was young. Very charming and vivacious, everybody says. She had many admirers."

"She's handsome enough now," Smith interjected. "Remarkably so."

"Isn't she? I love to look at her. There's something aristocratic—I love all her lines and curves. And don't make any mistake about it—I love *her*. I love her dearly. But sometimes I think she has never loved me. It sounds unnatural, but I'm afraid it's true. My father loved me but she—— And then you see I had a younger sister—Beatrice. And Beatrice was everything my mother's daughter should be. She was beautiful and graceful and charming and accomplished. She was sweet—people always took to her. Mother worshipped her. I always realised that; there was a difference in mother's treatment of us. I didn't mind though. It seemed natural. I adored Bee as much as mother did. I took a peculiar delight in her beauty. She was a black-haired, blue-eyed type. I'll show you her picture sometime."

"I'd like to see it," Smith said.

"Beatrice married five years ago—at twenty. She had a little girl—another Bee. Mother was very happy when Bee came—happier than I have ever known her. And so was I. I loved little Bee beyond words. I know that men aren't much interested in children, and I don't want to bore you. But I must tell you about Bee. She was—oh, I am very sure an exceptional child. She was beautiful and, even as a baby, had personality. And she

loved me. My single triumph was that she would come to me any time from her mother or her grandmother. There is a period between three and four when a baby is most engaging. It's just after she's learned how to talk and walk. Little Bee died just before her fourth birthday, and my sister died two days later—diphtheria."

Smith drew a sharp breath.

"It nearly killed my mother. As for me—well, I had mother to take care of. She all but went insane. And the effect of this shock and grief was to turn her indifference to me to what was temporarily a real mania of hatred. For weeks she reproached me incessantly for being alive when they were dead. God knows I would gladly have changed places with Bee. I don't think that temperamentally I have a strong desire to live, although I don't bother much about it one way or the other. After a while, that period passed. Mother settled back into her life again. We never mention Beatrice or Bee but——" She paused with a strangled abruptness.

"But your life is a hell," Smith finished for her.

"Yes—a hell." Hester admitted this as though to herself and as though for the first time. "You see her main criticism of me is that I don't have lovers like other girls." Hester laughed suddenly and there was real mirth in her laugh. "But I don't know what I can do about that."

"Why don't you leave her for a while?" Smith asked after a moment, when puffing vigorously and exuding long streamers of smoke, he seemed silently to consider the situation.

"She won't let me. By a curious contradiction she clings to me even while she despises me. Last year I was offered a really good position in Metchford. I am a teacher you know—here in the High School. She told me that if I accepted it, she would kill herself. This is what we had to fight immediately after Beatrice's death—suicidal mania. Of course I declined it—although we two could have boarded on her little income and my salary. Sometimes I feel as if I were at the end of my rope—— Sometimes——" Hester's voice grew deep as another woman's voice might have grown thin with hysteria. But as though this new note had resolved her emotions, her tone immediately changed to a clear quietness. "Please don't let it bother you. To-morrow I shall be all right. Only remember I shan't regret telling you. Already I feel better for it."

Smith smiled his charming smile. "I hope so. For perhaps I can help you—if not now, sometime. I mean—get you out of it."

His smile vanished abruptly and that inner turbulence suddenly made his eyes sombre, brought out concealed lines in a network all over his face. He broke into a harsh laugh. "I understand, Hester. God, how I understand. But there's always a way out and I'm going to find it for you."

"I thank you very much," Hester said with timid gratitude.

They walked without talking for another interval. The spacious night pressed hard on them. Stars, furred with silver, continued to shoot in straight lines into space. Fireflies, furred with gold, continued to draw eccentric arcs about them. Huge white moth-millers continued to beat silently against them. Trees webbed them in *allées* of a frail sooty-dark lace. Not a sound broke the stillness but the pad of their feet on the road. Smith had put his pipe away. He was negotiating a cigar now.

"You see, Hester," he broke the silence abruptly. "I understand because—well, I'm in prison too. I want to tell you about it. And I have never been tempted to tell anybody about it before—never." His voice sank a little on that second *never*. Immediately he resumed his pleasant quizzical tone. "I'd like to give confidence for confidence. But I can't be a mucker and that would be a mucker trick. I'm tied hand and foot just as you are. Your imprisonment may end sometime. Mine never will. That's why I understand. That's why I'm going to get you out."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Hester said. "I'm sorry. Somehow it seems more terrible for a man. Somehow it seems as though a man could not possibly know how to stand waiting and enduring."

Smith laughed. "Most of them do it very badly, I'll admit." He volunteered nothing further. They walked in silence.

"I've made a curious discovery," Hester said suddenly in a calm tone of discussion. "I've come to the conclusion that the instinct for grandmotherhood is almost as strong in some women as the instinct for motherhood. It is a terrible disappointment to my mother that I haven't married. In reality her quarrel is with life—that she will not be a grandmother again. That's one of her constant reproaches. And of course I'm helpless in the matter."

"Has it never occurred to you to adopt a child?"

"Oh, yes, but she's adamant on that point. I have discussed it with her a thousand times. She has that foolish pride in her own flesh and blood that so many people have. The child must be ours—she'll take no risks with alien strains. But then I'm not going to pay any attention to that. I shall adopt a child

sometime, maybe two. When I earn enough to take care of it. I've told her that."

"Oh, it's all wrong," Smith exclaimed, "this business of parenthood. Somehow it seems as though all the wrong people had children and none of the right ones. Have you ever read Wells' *Tono Bungay*? Do you remember that talk between Ewart and Ponderevo? That vision they have of a new arrangement of the world—the sexes to have their separate worlds—that City of the Women, beautiful with gardens, flowers, trees, fountains, and lakes, the men's world where they can fight and invent and hunt and sail? And when the women want the men, they let them come to visit them—they have a little ladder that they let down—do you remember?"

"Oh, perfectly," said Hester. "Only Ewart and Ponderevo agreed that there were objections to that plan. And there are. But of course there are objections to all plans."

"Yes, it seems so. However if there's one thing that I'm more convinced of than any other thing it is that there is one right of healthy normal women—the right to motherhood."

"The right to motherhood!" Hester repeated after him. "The right to motherhood! What an extraordinary idea! And what an appalling one! It frightens me."

"But, Hester, there's something more I want to say to you," Smith went on, not apparently interested in the abstract trend of their talk. "I feel a little foolish in saying it and I'm sure I shan't do it with much finesse. But I'm going to say it nevertheless. There's one point on which your mother is much mistaken—a misapprehension that you too share apparently. That is in the matter of personal pulchritude——" He smiled at his own phrase. "You know—or apparently you don't know—that there are two kinds of beauty. There's the obvious beauty that hits you straight in the face and knocks you over in the first round. Then there's the other kind that you don't get the first time you look at it. It's not so much a matter of line and colouring as of character and soul. Artists are the only ones ordinarily who see that kind of beauty. And even they don't always find it immediately. It's a fluid, changeable, imponderable, subtle thing, evasive, elusive, evanescent. It depends on mood and light and health—and—oh, a lot of things. You have that kind of beauty. Artists for instance would find you—at your best—paintable. I mean by that they would want to paint you."

"Paint *me*!" Hester echoed stupidly. "What for?"

"For what your face suggests—not what it is. What's finest

in you isn't on the surface. It isn't curve or colour. It never appears in an unsympathetic atmosphere. But it sifts out when you're excited or interested—in the play of hundreds of expressions, in the constant change of light to shade and shade back to light again. Some people would call you a Burne-Jones or a Rosetti. Southward is beautiful—at least she will be. She has that other more obvious kind of beauty and in addition of course *beauté du diable*. But she's not really lived or suffered in the big sense. She's as hard as nails, though a fine creature. That hardness still lies on her features. You haven't in any sense lived yet and that's missing from your face. Nor have you really suffered—in the big sense. You've suffered all the minor agonies, and that's made you only apathetic. But when you're with us and that apathy breaks—well, from my point of view, you're paintable.”

“Paintable!” Hester dully repeated the new word. “Are you crazy? Me?”

“No. I'm sane. You'll find it's true when you come to New York and our painter-friends tell you so.”

“Paintable!” Hester said.

“Paintable!” Smith iterated.

“Paintable!” Hester whispered. “Please say it again.”

Smith smiled. “Paintable!” he reiterated with his pleasant smile.

“Paintable!” Hester breathed.

“But,” Smith went on, “if you'll pardon me, I think you could improve your appearance if you did your hair differently. I don't know how you should do it of course. I'm as stupid as most men when it comes to such things. I'm quite sure though that your present system isn't the right one. You don't show it off to advantage, and it isn't correlated with your head.”

“Paintable!” Hester breathed again.

Mrs. Crowell's needles were still clicking when Hester returned.

“Well, I hope you've got over your temper,” she said without looking up at her daughter. “Where have you been—it's twelve now?”

“Yes, I've got over it,” Hester answered crisply both her mother's questions, “I've been walking with Mr. Smith.”

“Oh,” Mrs. Crowell sneered. “Still after him?”

Hester burst into a ringing laugh. “So it would seem.”

Startled, Mrs. Crowell looked at her.

An inner light had burned through every surface of Hester—a light so strong that it tore away her sallowness and dulness. Her

eyes shone, her teeth glittered, her hair sparkled. "Guess I'll go to bed," she said buoyantly. "Good night, mother."

Mrs. Crowell did not reply. She stared at the spot where Hester had stood. She listened attentively to Hester's new gait—that swift incisive tread on the stairs.

But Hester did not go to bed at once. She tore her clothes off, took her place before the mirror. She pulled her braid forward, unplaited it with fingers that fairly spun, pulled the strands out until it flowed in twin rivers of gold over each shoulder, across each breast. She leaned down suddenly and picked up Tabby who had followed her upstairs and now stood purring and curving against her bare legs. Then she stood moveless looking at herself in the glass.

That inner glow had deepened her eyes to wells, star-lighted at the bottom; it had changed her skin to porcelain, rose-tinted in the cheek. And her hair billowed up from her face like flame.

"Paintable!" Hester said. "Paintable! Paintable! Paintable!" She stood there a long time, murmuring the word in Tabby's ear.

CHAPTER VI

"I'm dreading it," Hester said without preliminary greeting, when the next day she met Southward at the cross-roads. And in fact, her face was dull. Deep circles lay under her eyes.

"I'm not," Southward boasted. "It would take more than two New York women to frighten me," she added contemptuously.

"I wouldn't be frightened if I were you," declared Hester. "You look lovely—you slim thing!"

Southward was all in white, a freshly laundered linen-gown, white Panama hat, white silk stockings, low white shoes. She was not smart, nor elegant, but she showed all her own natural trimness. Hester wore a gown that demonstrated perfectly her lack of sartorial authority, a navy-blue foulard, a typical country product, over-fitted and over-trimmed. An over-burdened country hat sat too high on her heavy braids.

"It's the queerest thing," Hester went on, "about five minutes before I go anywhere, I'd give the world to get out of it. In fact, now—oh, Southward—can't you go without me?"

Southward laughed heartlessly. "Can," she admitted in an amused tone, "but won't," she added in an inflexible one. "Buck up, Hester! Pull yourself together. Nothing's ever so bad as it seems. They won't eat you, and after it's over you'll find you've had an interesting experience. Remember I've said all along that this is the beginning of something wonderful."

"Yes, I know. It was all right when it was only men. They're not so critical, but when women come into it—I'm so afraid of strange women."

"Yes, but you can't go anywhere," Southward said impatiently, "without running into women. And you can't get anywhere without their help." She went on, perhaps with deliberate intention, to talk of other things. Hester listened obediently. At first she answered Southward's questions only with perturbed monosyllables. But before they had walked far, she had responded in whole to the fascination that Southward's quick, decisive, dogmatic personality always exercised on her.

"And there's the camp," Southward ended. "Looks pretty, doesn't it? Three tents. The men sleep in the big tent. Mrs.

Boardman and Mrs. Morrow have one of the small ones and Miss Hale the other. They do their cooking in the cabin and they eat out-of-doors on that big table under that big Chinese umbrella in the centre."

"How in the world do you know all this?" Hester laughed in spite of a palpable recrudescence of her perturbation.

"Lysander," Southward admitted calmly. "Looks as though there wasn't a soul there. They haven't seen us yet. Oh, there they are!"

Just ahead the country lane broke and merged with a big cleared grassy semi-circle that ended at a pond. On three sides, forests of pine and fir cushioned it with soft shadow; on the other side a pond seemed to set an enormous half bubble in the green earth. That bubble was lined with a blue that had dripped from the sky. And over this blue floated ghost-clouds, sun-shot to a silver fragility. The little camp that had seemed so quiet suddenly exploded with activity. From tents and cabins emerged summery figures.

"The woman in white is Mrs. Morrow," Southward explained. "The one in pink is Miss Hale. The grey-haired one is Mrs. Boardman."

Cameron and Smith disengaged themselves from the group, hurried forward to meet the girls.

"We were just about to organise a search party," Smith called. And "we've had our faces pressed against the window for the last half-hour," Cameron said reproachfully.

"Are we late?" Southward asked without apparent guile. "Did your guests come?"

"Yes—last night," Smith answered.

"I wish you could see how we've worked for two days to make this place ship-shape for you and them," Cameron exclaimed.

"You needn't have worked for me," Southward interjected, "I don't care how it looks."

"It was Miss Crowell we were really afraid of," Smith announced.

Hester smiled, still struggling with embarrassment. "It will please Hester to think anybody's scared of her," Southward came to her rescue.

They were drawing near to the camp. The three women were sitting now in the little cleared circle. "I've got to do the introducing," Smith declared. "It's the worst job I know. Mrs. Boardman," he said in a stern tone of command, addressing the elderly woman, "I'm going to put you through first."

Mrs. Boardman lifted a head of grey hair, carefully coiled, and

studded with hairpins of a silvery shell, a neat-featured, small face, a little grey too, and grey eyes of a shoe-button roundness.

"Let me introduce Miss Drake and Miss Crowell. And Mrs. Morrow and Miss Hale, Miss Drake and Miss Crowell. Morena, let me present you to Miss Drake and Miss Crowell—his hind name's O'Reilly by the way. And Rip—Mr. Fearing—let me introduce you to Miss Drake and Miss Crowell. Thank heavens, that's out of my system."

The flurry of names died away in a general murmur. Out of it came Mrs. Morrow's flute-like voice. "John is the only man I know who never mixes himself up in introductions. He always introduces the young to the old, the male to the female, the unmarried to the married, the obscure to the famous. It's because he likes mathematics." Mrs. Morrow laughed gaily at her own cryptic explanation. "Now," she added, "as Miss Drake and Miss Crowell have not seen the camp, I propose to show it to them. Especially as we're all bursting with pride over an unnatural condition of neatness. Don't bother to come, mother." She turned to Mrs. Boardman.

"I was going to ask to be excused," said Mrs. Boardman. Her head, of which not a hair had seceded from an elaborate coiffure, bent over the delicate lace she was working. "I think I've walked enough for one day."

Mrs. Morrow placed herself on one side of Southward. Cameron darted to the other side. Morena O'Reilly took a position at Mrs. Morrow's right. Hester followed with the others.

"Have you ever camped out, Miss Drake?" Mrs. Morrow asked.

"Often," Southward answered, turning her eyes straight on her interlocutor, "in this very camp." A glimmer appeared suddenly between her eyelashes. She turned her gaze away; it met Morena O'Reilly's glance fixed intently on her. For an instant, they stared at each other. In that instant, a spark flashed from eye to eye.

"I suppose you've been proposed to all over the place," Morena O'Reilly accused her suddenly.

Southward blushed—the blush of one whose secret thought has been exposed. But it was a beautiful blush, more a glow really; as though some flame-coloured liquid fountaining up into her face had been transmuted by her bronzed skin to gold. She kept her straight-lashed gaze directly on Morena, however. "Shayneford is an Adamless Eden—almost, Mr. O'Reilly." In another instant the blush had evaporated. "You do look comfortable here," she said with a renewed coolness.

Mrs. Morrow's oblique gaze had stayed on her during this little interval. "There's always one kind of comfort where men are," she said. "Of course we're very lucky to have a cabin with a stove in it. Ling cooks us the most wonderful food. Here's the kitchen."

Southward glanced into the hut with an appraising eye. "You'd better mend that chimney before it rains," she advised practically. "or you'll have trouble. That stove is a beast in rainy weather. I've had my own troubles with it."

"All right," said John Smith, "I'll see to that."

"Here's where the men sleep." Cameron pulled back the flaps of the big army-tent and the group stood for an instant gazing in. In each corner was a cot, covered with grey army-blankets. Four chairs, set with mathematical accuracy about a big deal table, made the rest of the furnishings. Clothes suspended on hangers dangled from a square frame-work. Everything was orderly.

"I wish you could have seen it three hours ago when John cleaned it up," Mrs. Morrow commented, laughing. "John is really neat. He has the military idea of cleanliness. He's more than military—he's ascetic. No, he's worse than ascetic—he's conventual." She turned so that she flung this word straight into Smith's face. He acknowledged it, bowing. "The rest are far from conventual." She transferred her dazzling smile to Cameron, "especially Dwight."

"Personally," Mr. O'Reilly protested, "I can't see the use of hanging things up or of putting them away; you're always needing them, so why not leave them where you can find them?" He turned to Southward as though for support.

"I quite agree," Southward had begun.

"There's a great deal in what you say, Morena," Mrs. Morrow interrupted. She smiled at him. "I'm a little that way, myself." By a slight indicatory movement, she set them all moving forward.

Rarely pretty, certainly not lovely and in no circumstances beautiful, Mrs. Morrow would always be interesting, picturesque, a little exotic. Any beauty that regularity could give was missing from her face; it did not in shape even approach the oval, conventionally demanded for beauty; it was round; it had a perturbing concavity of contour. Her colouring was unusual, pale blond, not so much a northern blondness as a sea-blondness. She would have made an admirable mermaid. Her eyes were grey, pale and baleful—pale because lashes thickly dark made contrast with them; and baleful because the broad white lids drooped half over

the pupils. White and smooth, her skin had a faint natural gloss which she did not entirely dull with powder. Her soft fine hair, silvery-gold with a hint of green, grew in a beautiful curving line about her brow, her ears, the round of her neck. Her lips were the purple-red of ripe cherries. Her figure was saved from voluptuousness by a suggestion of the underlying muscularity of a big frame. She was extraordinarily supple.

Beyond, Morena O'Reilly presented a marked contrast to Mrs. Morrow's sea-blondness. So dark that he was almost swarthy, rings in his ears and a blood-red handkerchief on his head would have seemed appropriate decoration. His hair was cut close, but it broke into thick jetty black waves, so stiff that they might have been carved from coal. His jetty eyebrows were thick, his jetty eyelashes long. He wore above lips red and as beautifully shaped as a woman's, a crisp jetty moustache, thick but short. The blend of two races was apparent in his face but it was a perplexed study to disentangle them. For although his hair was Spanish in colour, it was Irish in curl. And although his deep blue eyes were Irish in expression they were Spanish in shape. The whiteness of his skin on the other hand was all Celt, the fulness of his lips all Spanish. There was nothing girlish about him, although he escaped only by a miracle being too good-looking. He was wiry and tensely-drawn as to figure, twinklingly humorous as to expression.

Beyond these two walked Southward, slim and straight with her quick alert boy's gait, her head ground to a boyish roundness by the heavy sleek hair, her eyes, straight-lashed and straight-gazing, jet poured into silver, her raspberry lips parted showing the blue-white edge of her little teeth. Beside Hester, the city-women looked like hot-house plants—exquisitely trained and cared-for. Beside Southward, they looked like sunless cellar-products—almost under-nourished. Southward's skin might have been satin but for its hardness, bronze but for its flexibility, glass but for its fluidity. Something moved under it, constantly giving it light, shadow, colour. Yet, if you tapped it, you would expect it to ring faintly like metal.

Behind, Hester walked with Miss Hale and John Smith. Ripley Fearing had taken Miss Hale's parasol. He tried to hold it over both women. Obviously, Hester still suffered from the embarrassment of so much new acquaintance. Perhaps Miss Hale was equally embarrassed or perhaps she was naturally quiet. At any rate, Smith kept up a running fire of small-talk, humorous comment, impertinent question, full of a harmless male-antagonism

that gradually drew the women together as allies and brought all four into the sunny whimsicality of his mood. From under the parasol, Ripley Fearing aided and abetted him.

"You and Miss Hale have a great many points in common, Hester," John said once, "I prophesy fearlessly that you're going to like each other."

"Oh, I'm sure of that," came from under the parasol.

Hester murmured something utterly inarticulate but corroborative.

"Of course I know," Smith went on, "that to make a remark like that is the signal for the people involved to hate each other. But in this case, you can't hate each other. I forbid it."

"Oh, we won't do that. We promise, don't we, Miss Crowell?"

Again Hester murmured in assent something that nobody could possibly have caught.

"But what have we in common, John?" Miss Hale continued. Her voice was low, languid, singularly expressionless. It was a little like the voice of a deaf woman. Only its natural music prevented it from being monotonous.

"Well, to begin with—you're both lazy," Smith answered promptly.

"Dear me," said Edith Hale with an enlivening touch of archness, "I had hoped that he was going to say beautiful. Didn't you, Miss Crowell?"

"I looked for 'charming' at the very least." Hester had at last got her shyness under control.

"And in addition," John struck on vigorously, "you're both unenterprising, lackadaisical, lymphatic, dead-and-alive."

"What would you prescribe for us, John?" came the sweet, dead voice from under the parasol.

"Get into a revolutionary movement of some description," Smith said. "Throw a few bricks, set a few buildings on fire—break all the laws you can."

"There's plenty of that sort of stuff to be done," Fearing suggested, "without breaking any laws. I can get you both a job picketing in the next woman's strike that comes up in New York. Have you ever knocked a man down, Miss Crowell?"

"Only one," Hester answered apologetically.

The effect of this simple statement was extraordinary. Miss Hale emitted a ripple of laughter that had real mirth in it. But the men burst into roars so loud and prolonged that the quartette in front turned back.

"It's only Miss Crowell who's going to tell us how she knocked

a man down once," John explained. "I aimed at a sparrow and brought down a seraph," he added in an aside to Miss Hale.

"It wasn't anything to tell," Hester faltered. And she blushed one of her terrific, unbecoming blushes. "It happened one night in Oldtown. A party of us were out walking. There was a little young girl with us. As we passed a group of men, one of them spoke to her and put his hand on her shoulder. And I—I never could remember exactly what happened. I didn't stop to think. I hit out at him. He was balancing on the edge of the sidewalk. Anyway he went right over sideways. Mercy how it scared me!"

"What did he do?" Fearing asked with interest.

"I don't know," Hester answered. "We all ran away, screaming."

Everybody laughed. The forward four turned and went on. Hester relapsed into silence.

"I think," Mr. Fearing commented, emerging from the parasol, "there's good stuff here. Edith's almost a hopeless case. I'm afraid we never can make a militant of her. But I don't see why we should train Miss Crowell to beat up policemen."

"Here we come to the boudoirs," Mrs. Morrow called from the front. "We can dispense with the company of the men-people."

Protesting, the men returned to the cabin. Mrs. Morrow pulled back the flap of her tent. "I'll take Miss Crowell to my place," Edith Hale said suddenly.

"All right," Mrs. Morrow agreed. "That may save time. They're to ring the bell when tea's ready."

Mrs. Morrow's tent was almost as big as the men's.

For a non-committal instant Southward's gaze went first to the trunk that stood open on end in a corner. One half was filled with clothes suspended on hangers as neatly ordered as a closet. The other half was filled with drawers, half-opened. On the two beds lay linen cases embroidered with initials. Over one bed-end hung a negligée of pale-green silk, profusely trimmed with a delicate butter-coloured lace, a boudoir-cap of the same lace trimmed with narrow ribbons of the same green. On a painted bureau stood a mirror in carved and gilded wood. About this in puzzling variety lay toilet-articles in gold and green enamel, little boxes and big, small brushes and large, thin bottles and fat, many golden instruments so tiny and slim, so pointed and sharp that, but for the coquettish decoration on their handles, they would have been surgical in effect. Southward's gaze slashed over these things; it lingered for the longest interval on an old bureau of mahogany, standing across a corner.

"Why, that's Gert Beebee's bureau," she exclaimed suddenly.

"Yes, isn't it a wonder!" Mrs. Morrow said. "A real Sheraton. Mother bought it of her this morning. For a song too. This town must be full of old stuff. Mother deals in it, you know. Would you like some powder? Or a comb? Or a hairpin?" She rapidly flipped off the covers of one or two of the enamelled boxes.

Southward declined these conveniences. She never powdered. Her skin always kept its faint metallic lustre. And her hair, by means of its own cohesion, always clung close to her head.

Mrs. Morrow seated herself cross-legged on the bed, the tips of her shining black shoes protruding from under the hem of her pearly skirt.

"I don't suppose you've seen enough of Shayneford to know what it's like yet," Southward began.

"No, but we went about a little this morning. And Dwight's driving me over to Wingate to-morrow. That will give me some idea of the country. I think Shayneford is a duck of a place. I feel so exhilarated here somehow. I was awfully tired when I came down. It just happened that mother and I had to be in New York part of the summer—not quite in—but out and in—you know what I mean—week-ending. It seems so jolly to have two weeks of uninterrupted country quiet. Oh, by the way," Mrs. Morrow interrupted herself as though her fluent flow of talk had come on a cross-current of interruption, "who is the young person who drove us from the station—tall, strong-looking, blond?"

"Oh, you mean Lysander, I guess. Lysander Manning."

"He's awfully handsome, isn't he?"

"Yes. Lysander's the best-looking man in Shayneford."

"What does he do?"

"Everything. He's a rolling-stone. He generally takes some sort of travelling job for the winter—farms here summers."

"I thought he was a darling—too ducky for words."

Mrs. Morrow spoke in a quick, abrupt way and constant emphasis lent a staccato accent to her speech. She was restless. Her hands were always going to her brow to push back the encroaching ripples of hair, or they pulled at the fine gold chain which held a lorgnette, or they adjusted the folds of her skirt. Southward sat absolutely still. Utterly non-committal in expression, motionless, except when the sweep of her lashes accompanied her gaze, she might have been a carved figure.

"By the way," Mrs. Morrow's conversation jumped suddenly in another direction. "What do you think of Dwight's novel?"

"His novel—his novel!" Southward repeated. "Oh, you mean *Ginger*. Oh, I——"

"No. I don't mean *Ginger*. Everybody likes that of course. I mean the new one—the one he's begun down here. You all have seen it of course."

"I haven't," Southward answered with composure and with indifference.

"I haven't either," Mrs. Morrow admitted with a pretty vexation. "He's spoken of it several times in his letters. But I can't get him to show it to me. He's become self-conscious all of a sudden. He's always been awfully nice about his stuff. I'm really vexed with him now. He comes up to our place a good deal to work in the winter. He says it's the only spot in New York in which he can be quiet. I always read everything as fast as he turns it out. I'll tell you what we'll do. Perhaps we can get him to read a chapter or two to-night."

Southward made no comment beyond, "That would be interesting."

"You know I am very much worried about Dwight," Mrs. Morrow went on. She turned for a moment to gaze absent-mindedly into the glass and to fluff with two vicious dabs the hair which lay on her forehead. "He's really got great ability. *Ginger* made a sensation and had a very good sale for a first book. He should have written another immediately to follow up that success. But he's been in New York for five years now without turning out a word of fiction. I scold him dreadfully about it. I think this place has been awfully good for him. It's apparently started something. When he gets back to New York I shall shut him in the study every night when he's off duty, lock the door and throw away the key. I shan't let him out until he's produced something." She smiled at this picture of feminine tyranny. Her teeth were big, set a little apart from each other. Somehow they increased by an infinitesimal quantity that baleful quality of her look.

As before, Southward made only one comment. "That would be a good system, I should say." But she did not once take her straight-lashed gaze, fuller than usual of its enigmatic directness, from Mrs. Morrow's face.

Mrs. Morrow drew her skirt aside and absently examined the big steel buckles on her patent leather shoes. "New York is no place for work however. It's too noisy, too brilliant, too full of colour, light, sounds, smells, drinks, and eats," she continued fluently. "I'm trying my best to get Dwight out of the newspaper business for good, to induce him to buck the free-lance

game. It's just a matter of his saving enough to carry him for six months. Of course he's wild to do it but he thinks it's too much of a risk. It isn't *really*. But you can't make *him* see that. I'm sure that going abroad would do wonders for him. I'm dying to have him go with us. We can put everything—positively everything in his way. Do help me to get him to go, Miss Drake."

"I can't think I have much influence with Mr. Cameron," Southward answered with composure. "I'll do all I can of course." She spoke with great seriousness and she dropped her long-lashed look to her lap. It was just in time, that sweep of the lids, to cover the blue-and-black glimmer in her eyes.

Hester had accompanied Miss Hale to her tent. She sat in a crepuscular atmosphere that was faintly rosy in tint, gazing in bewilderment about her. The inside of the tent had been hung with a rose-garlanded chintz, that pulled the walls together and gave the air its colour. It seemed to be spilling over with things—two trunks, one of them for hats, carved ivory toilet articles, a bag of chintz, another of brocade, a third of lace, photographs framed in silver or leather, standing on bureau and table.

"Do you like Shayneford, Miss Hale?" Hester asked timidly, after a preliminary patter of general question and answer.

"I think it is very beautiful," Miss Hale responded, "but very sad."

Expression had crept for the first time into Miss Hale's voice. When she said *beautiful* it was as though beauty were a sadness; and when she said *sad*, it was as though sadness were also a beauty.

"It is sad," Hester agreed, "although most people don't see that. I think almost all old New England towns are sad—they belong so much to the past. I'm glad you like Shayneford. I'm very tired of it myself. But I think it is a beautiful place and I am always pleased when people admire it. You see I have lived here all my life."

"How strange to have lived always in one place," Miss Hale commented. Her voice became dreamy. "It must give you such a feeling of belonging somewhere. I've lived in so many places. I belong everywhere, or nowhere."

"Oh, that must be a wonderful feeling," exclaimed Hester. "A citizen of the world. I should like that."

"It's not quite that, after all," Edith Hale confessed. "It's not so fine or splendid. I'm not in any sense a citizen of the world. It's more that I feel disembodied, that I'm a citizen of space. Sometimes I think it's worse than that. It's as though I'd wandered onto the wrong planet, as though I really belonged

in Jupiter or Venus or Mars and got here by mistake." She stopped.

"I think," Hester said, giving this statement the thoughtful consideration that, in conversation, was typical of her, "I would not like that."

"I assure you I don't like it." Miss Hale smiled for the first time. Just as her voice held music without emotion, her smile held illumination without mirth. "I would like more than anything," she went on, "to think that there was somewhere an old house that belonged to me and always had belonged to me or mine—an old, old house with an old, old flower-garden, old, old furniture, old, old pictures, and perhaps a ghost—a very gentle ghost—oh, I think I would always be going away for the sake of coming back to it."

"I think I understand that," Hester said earnestly, "notwithstanding most of the time I wish I could leave Shayneford and never see it again."

"Really," Miss Hale commented doubtfully. "Really," she said again. Suddenly her voice grew full and vibrant with emotion. "Of course you do. Nobody wants to stay where he must. Oh——" Her voice took another leap deeper into emotion. It vibrated with a full swing. "Oh, the souls that are in prison!"

Hester did not reply for a moment. And plainly she was a little startled by this emotional rending of the veil. She looked at Miss Hale with all her sympathy and interest working vividly in her face. And suddenly she came into possession of an unexpected articulateness.

"Yes," she answered quietly. "I think most souls are in prison. And sometimes I wonder if 'prison' isn't synonymous with 'life.' I mean if it isn't a crucible of character. To be put into solitary confinement and to see no way out, to know that the sun and moon and trees and flowers and birds are just a little way off and yet not be able to get to them, to know that one's sentence will never be commuted—after all, that's the final test of the stuff that's in you." She stopped abruptly and with a recurrence of her temperamental shyness, stared pleadingly at her companion.

Of all four women, Miss Hale was obviously the oldest; she could have been either side of forty. Strictly speaking, she was the most feminine type among them, notwithstanding features as coldly regular as those of a Greek head and notwithstanding a certain unanalysable quality of unhealthiness. Everything about her pointed to a brave fight against the despoilments of maturity. Her skin, in spite of a waxy whiteness, looked cared-for; her

shining hair arranged, with a careful carelessness, softened and shadowed it. Her very brows and lashes in some mysterious way bespoke training. They could not conceal, however, that the hazel eyes under them were sad and that little whitish wrinkles had drawn faint gossamers at their corners. Her features had begun to sharpen. She was like a flower on the first day of fading; as though the live, warm, breathing, palpitating texture, without loss of tint or shape, had suddenly turned to a transparent porcelain.

This worn womanliness was pointed by clothes that contrasted in every possible way with Mrs. Morrow's piquant smartness. She was dressed exactly as though the tent were a drawing-room. Her short gown was a soft rose-coloured silk. As far as possible, it receded from close-fitting lines in favour of a delicate reactionary fulness. Everything about her was fine in quality, fragile in fabric, clinging or floating; she was *soignée* to the last detail. A triangular shawl of an old white *point d'Alençon* hung about her shoulders. Under her chin was a *chou* of white malines, fastened with bar-pins of pearl. Thin, close high-heeled slippers of white suede showed every outline of her pretty feet.

Miss Hale's expression had responded with fitting light and shade, with involuntary sensitive movements of the lips to Hester's speech. "Yes," she agreed, "I am sure you are right. I think——"

But what Miss Hale thought never manifested itself. For, "There's the phonograph," Mrs. Morrow's clear voice announced from the next tent. "Tea's ready."

CHAPTER VII

SMITH was unpacking a tea-basket on the big table in the centre of the camp platform. Cameron was watching the flame of a little silver tea-kettle whose nose emitted a thin coil of steam. The other two men were flying back and forth from table to kitchen, fetching crackers and cheese, opening tins of sardines and bottles of olives. Mrs. Boardman, still placidly crocheting, occasionally offered a suggestion.

Mrs. Morrow seated herself at the table indicated to everybody where he was to sit, arranged the tea-cups, asked and received instructions as to milk, cream, sugar, and lemon. All the time, the phonograph continued to play and, all the time, in spite of her preoccupation, Mrs. Morrow's trim feet, her supple waist, her square strong-looking shoulders were moving with it.

She drank her tea almost in a gulp. Then she put the cup down with a decisive gesture. "I can't stand it a moment longer," she confided to them all. "Come and dance with me, Dwight, or I shall explode."

Cameron was at that moment talking with Southward. He arose after a pause that was barely perceptible, put down his untasted tea and moved over to Mrs. Morrow's chair. She arose. His arm went about her waist. She rested her hands, palms upward, on his forearms; they floated off.

"Mrs. Morrow is a wonderful dancer," Southward said at the end of a minute to Morena O'Reilly, who had immediately moved into Cameron's place.

"Yes," O'Reilly agreed without removing his eyes from Southward's face. "Wonderful! She's a born dancer. She'd rather dance than eat."

"They're perfectly matched," Southward went on, "Mr. Cameron is a good dancer too."

"Possibly," O'Reilly answered and still his eyes clung to Southward's face. "I'm not looking at them." He paused. Southward's gaze followed the dancers. "Perhaps because I've got something better to look at." His voice dropped a little.

At this, Southward turned. Her eyes met his. Coolly and speculatively she looked at him. And again, begotten of nothing,

that spark flashed through the air between them. But Southward continued to study him coolly and speculatively. Then, "I congratulate you," Southward said, "I haven't anything better to look at."

However she said this with a smile and after another keen-eyed interval of consideration, she turned away from the dancers and gave Morena her full attention. Everybody else watched Mrs. Morrow and Cameron; occasionally they applauded.

They were indeed well matched. Mrs. Morrow had the dancer's build, the dancer's gift, the dancer's delight in dancing. Cameron had the poised, perfected body of the born athlete. He moved with authority and grace. They wove through a variety of figures that must have been improvised; yet it was as though they had been rehearsed. Mrs. Morrow's supple body responded to the faintest hint from her partner. And always her shoulders curved and palpitated, her waist swayed and spiralled, her hands, turned palm upward, cupped and fluttered.

Cameron guided her deftly to a chair just as the record threatened to run down. He bowed low. "Put in another disc, John," he called. Then he made directly to Southward who, deep in tête-à-tête with Morena O'Reilly, apparently did not see him. "May I have this?" Cameron interrupted.

Southward looked up at him, smiled, appeared to hesitate, complied finally. She danced well too—but with the clean, rhythmic, unsexed quality of a young boy joying in exercise. Any dancing must, however, seem commonplace in comparison with Mrs. Morrow's. After an interested interval, their audience fell again into conversation. John asked Hester to dance, then Miss Hale. Both women declined, Miss Hale because she was too tired, Hester because she could not dance.

Dwight and Southward continued, Cameron signalling to Smith from time to time to renew the records. Mrs. Morrow watched them, her feet twinkling back and forth under her skirt, her whole body swaying in sympathy. "Come, Morena," she called finally. "I can't stand this any longer. I'll dance with you even if I am mad with you." Morena leaped gallantly to her side. He was a better dancer even than Dwight. He had a Latin fluidity of physique; they moved as one person. Nobody looked at the other two.

Smith continued to feed the phonograph. He dropped comments from time to time to Miss Hale. She reclined in her steamer-chair, her statuesque arms extended, her beautiful hands folded in her lap. She listened attentively to whatever Smith

said but she herself was silent. Sometimes apparently the impulse to speak would seize her. Her lips would part, a faint colour would flood her face. But just as her mouth settled on the first word, she would mentally sink back into herself; her remark would melt into a sigh.

"What do you think of her, Edith?" Smith said finally in an undertone.

"Oh, she's sweet!" Miss Hale replied with a little drift of animation. "But pathetic."

"Lord, yes—pathetic—horribly so," Smith agreed. "Thank you for getting that awful hat off. Hasn't her face interesting possibilities?"

"Wonderful. Miron would paint her to-night if he were here."

"Did you ever see such extraordinary hair?"

"No. Except that there's really too much for beauty. She ought to cut half of it off."

"Good Lord!" Smith ejaculated. "Cut that hair! That ought to be a State Prison offence."

Miss Hale laughed her low sad laugh. "That's so like a man," she commented. "'A woman's crowning glory is her hair.' We women haven't so much respect for mere quantity you know. But that seems to be all that appeals to men. You don't know what quality is. Azile's hair for instance, is simply wonderful. I wonder if that deification of mere quantity is a relic of the days when a long thick braid of hair was so convenient to drag a woman round by."

Smith smiled. "Perhaps. I think you're going to like her more and more, Edith. I don't know of anybody I'd rather have for your friend. And God knows, she needs a friend. You do too," he added as an afterthought.

Ripley Fearing had in the meantime moved over to Hester's side.

"Don't you dance, Miss Crowell?" he inquired.

"No," Hester said.

"Don't you like it—or perhaps you don't approve."

"Oh, I don't disapprove," Hester protested. "It isn't *that* at all. It's only I guess, that I never tried."

"Why not?" Mr. Fearing asked.

"I was too shy and self-conscious until I was grown up," Hester explained, "and after that, I was ashamed to learn. And yet——" She paused.

"And yet," Mr. Fearing urged her.

"I've a sort of feeling that I would enjoy dancing very much

if I only learned. Oh, I *know* I'd be crazy about it. You see when I was a very little girl, I used to compose dances."

"Compose dances," Fearing repeated. "That's very interesting. You anticipated a new art. Dances are created nowadays just as much as music or poetry or pictures or sculpture. Tell me about it."

"I—I—I don't think there's really anything to tell." Hester's embarrassment floundered finally to a full stop. She stared helplessly into Fearing's face.

It was a strange face, ugly but kind. The perceptible droop of the lower lids of his brown eyes gave to his long slim rectangular countenance a hound-like quality. His eyes had the hound's steadiness and quiet, a little of the hound's melancholy. In conversation, those eyes glowed; when he listened, they blurred, grew vague. They dulled now; it seemed to give Hester courage.

She swung suddenly into one of those intervals of ease and inarticulateness that occasionally broke her constitutional shyness.

"My mother used to play the piano a great deal when I was a little girl. She wasn't a finished musician by any means but she loved to play and she had a very soft touch. Many a time, I've waked in the morning to her playing and many a time I've fallen asleep to it. And sometimes at twilight, she'd sit for hours at the piano. As I grew older, I'd shut myself in my room and dance to her music. She did not know it. Nobody knew it. I would have died rather than—— I say *dance*——and yet——" Hester's brow roughened with perplexity, "it wasn't exactly what you'd call dancing. It was——whatever movement the music suggested to me. At any rate, it always seemed to me that each piece of music required a different dance. I used to love it really. I felt——well, I can't tell you exactly how I felt——but I had a sensation of great delight. I was always rested afterwards, although I've danced for an hour at a time."

"And don't you ever dance any more?" Fearing asked after a pause.

"Oh, no——mother never plays any more. And then I suppose I would not have kept it up anyway. I was awfully shy about it. I couldn't have danced before people for anything. And of course it was harder to conceal as I grew older. And so I just naturally outgrew the impulse. And the fact that mother played less and less must have made a difference. She never touches the piano now. Why I can't remember when there's been any music in the house."

"And why is that?" Fearing continued.

"I don't know," Hester said slowly. "Or at least I guess it's part growing old and part the sadness of life."

"It's a pity that either of you should have stopped," Fearing commented. "It would undoubtedly do you good to dance and your mother good to play. I'm going to teach you to dance."

"Oh, I couldn't, I'm afraid," Hester protested.

"You can and must," Fearing asserted with his kind decisiveness. "Now. Come!"

He drew her away from the others, back into the shadow of the trees, put his arm about her. "Now do exactly as I tell you," he ordered kindly. He gave her some brief succinct directions.

Obviously limp with fright, obviously half-blind and half-deaf with embarrassment, Hester tried to follow his directions. But her efforts were more struggle than dance.

"You're not doing what I tell you," Fearing said calmly releasing her. "Listen, I'll tell you once more." He repeated his instructions with the same limpid conciseness. "Try again!"

"I can't," Hester breathed.

"Yes you can—if you'll listen. Now I'll tell you once more. Now we're off."

"I can't," Hester faltered. But even as she said it, she began to respond to his determination, to sway in time to the music. He held her there dancing without a rest while record after record ran its course. "You're doing beautifully," he encouraged her. "And you're a natural dancer—just as I suspected. That's right. What did I tell you? I'm proud of you."

"I say," Mrs. Morrow called suddenly. "Let's all go in swimming now and have dinner later." She dropped into her chair at the head of the tea-table. She picked up a fan and fanned herself violently. The tendrils of her floss-fine hair flew in every direction in the violent breeze she evoked. Wherever Mrs. Morrow alighted there was always disturbance. Everybody stopped talking to look at her now; for everybody, except Southward—and Dwight perhaps—was drawn into the suction of her centripetal personality.

"Sure, I'm for that," exclaimed Dwight. "How about the others?" His eye swept the group but it stopped at Southward.

"I can't go in swimming," said Southward, "I brought no suit."

"And I don't swim anyway," Hester interposed hastily.

"Please take my suit, Miss Drake," offered Edith Hale. "I never enjoy bathing so late in the day. It takes too long to get warm afterwards. I think it will fit you very nicely."

"Thank you. I shall be very glad to wear it."

"I've brought quantities of books down here, Miss Crowell," Edith Hale said, "I'm one of those people who have to read themselves to sleep every night. And I think I have all the newest magazines. Wouldn't you like to borrow some of them?"

"Oh, I would!" Hester exclaimed. "And my mother is always so glad of a new book. Our Library doesn't give us much of a choice you know."

"Let's come back to my tent for a moment. There are some nice new English novels and the latest volume of Masefield."

The group broke up. The bathers departed swiftly in the direction of the tents. Mrs. Boardman retired for her afternoon nap. Hester and Edith strolled more slowly in her wake.

The bathers returned after a while, the men in gymnasium suits, Mrs. Morrow in a one-piece arrangement of a brilliant red silk, Southward in a more conventional two-piece suit—also of silk—a piquant combination of black with white. They lined up on the bank and at a signal ran to the water's edge and plunged in.

If Mrs. Morrow had been the centre of attraction while they danced, Southward usurped that place when they swam. And just as obviously as Mrs. Morrow danced for the joy of dancing, Southward swam for the joy of swimming. Her slim body cut the water like a knife-blade; yet she had the buoyancy of a cork. The water controlled the others. Southward controlled the water. She could move through it like a motor-boat, tearing it to a moving whirlpool of foam or, seeming to float hands and feet under the surface, she would skim along as though propelled by an invisible force. She held her head and shoulders high, or she dropped her chin into the hollow of her crooked elbow, or she hid her face in the water; it seemed to make no difference in her speed. She swam under water for incredible intervals. Her vitality was proof against cold; the colour staid in her cheeks and lips. After diving, her sleek head became more sleek with the jetty mass of her hair clinging wet to it. It began to grow dark. Mrs. Morrow, protesting that she was cold, emerged and disappeared into her tent. One by one, the men deserted the water. Finally Southward and Dwight, left alone, headed towards the centre of the lake, all but disappeared in the twilight.

"How do you like them?" Dwight asked as they pulled beyond earshot.

"Very much," Southward replied with a tempered enthusiasm.

"I'm awfully interested in your first impressions," Cameron went on. "What do you think of Rip?"

"I haven't had much to say to him yet," Southward answered

instantly. "And of course he's not exactly the sort of man that I find myself most at home with——"

"What sort of man is that?" Dwight interrupted.

"Well—I don't know exactly how to describe the kind of man I like—he can't be too practical and out-of-doorsy. You're more my type of course, and Lysander Manning. I feel as if I might find it hard to talk with your Mr. Fearing. And yet I like him too."

"He's a dandy," Cameron said enthusiastically. "Now, what do you think of Morena?"

Southward smiled a little. And for a moment, she did not answer. "I think he's awfully handsome," she said after a while, as though she were not saying all she thought.

"I suppose he is," Cameron commented. "I'd forgotten all about that though. I remember when I first met him, I didn't think he could be a Regular Fellow and yet be such a Handsome Hank."

"Where did you meet him?" Southward asked.

"Mrs. Morrow picked him up somewhere in Europe—Paris I think. He's part Irish, part Spanish but a lot American. She persuaded him to come back to America—he'd got a little expatriate. He ran with a crowd of fellows whose main business in life is drinking cocktails at the American bar there. Azile just reached out and clawed him out of that set, made a new man of him. She's great on that—seeing what's in people and making them develop it."

Southward made no comment.

"What do you think of the women, Miss Hale for instance?" Cameron went on categorically.

"I don't see how anybody could help liking her," Southward said, "although she's not my particular kind of woman."

"What is your particular kind of woman?" Dwight demanded again.

"No kind," Southward declared instantly. "As a rule I hate women—all except Hester—of course I'm strong for Hester. And Charlotte. I suppose Miss Hale is probably more Hester's sort than mine—not that anybody could help liking her, she's so gentle and sweet. She seems sad somehow. She's beautiful though—almost like a Greek head, isn't she?"

"Yes—sculptors always go crazy over her. Her type is a little cold and regular for my taste. But I see all that you see and she's a fine woman of course. What do you think of Mrs. Morrow?" There was an offhand quality to Cameron's inflection.

"She's very fascinating," Southward said with emphasis. "And a wonderful dancer. Quite picturesque too." She paused an instant. "Is she a widow?" she asked casually.

"Yes. She was a Mrs. Henry Morrow. Mrs. Azile Morrow now."

"Azile!" Southward repeated. "Azile! What a queer name! Is that her own name?"

"Yes—oh, yes."

"Azile," Southward reiterated musingly in the tone of one who is visualising the word, "Azile!" Suddenly in the depths of her eyes appeared the blue-and-black glimmer of her mirth. "Azile Morrow," she repeated carelessly. "It's a pretty name. She's very different-looking, if you know what I mean."

"Artists always go wild about her," Cameron went on. "Everybody does for that matter. She's the greatest sport in New York. Always ready for a good time. She's as strong as an ox. She doesn't know what it means to be tired. She loves the theatre, gives successful box-parties, is mad about dancing, has dancing parties at her house two or three times a week, knows everybody and entertains all the time when she isn't being entertained. You'll like her. You two were just built for each other."

Southward smiled cryptically. "She interests me very much. What was Mr. Morrow like?"

"I never saw but one picture of him—severe-looking old guy with military moustaches. She rarely mentions him. He had a little money when he married her, but she had expectations from an old aunt—an Aunt Eliza who was a great character. And I'll be blowed if the old girl—she was over seventy—didn't suddenly up and marry a man thirty years younger than herself. She died inside a year, leaving it all to her husband."

Southward smiled cryptically again. "Don't you think we'd better turn back now?"

"All right. Just as you say." They turned and swam a while in silence. "By the way," Cameron said carelessly, "I'm taking Mrs. Morrow to drive to-morrow. She wants to see something of the country. I thought we'd go over in the North Shayneford direction. It's pretty there—I think you said."

"Oh, yes, awfully pretty," Southward answered.

Another silence came. "What are you doing to-morrow evening?" Cameron asked. "I thought if you'd let me, I'd call in the usual way and by the usual method—I mean the garret."

"Oh—to-morrow evening," Southward exclaimed in a tone of polite regret. "Mr. O'Reilly's coming over. He asked me if he

might see the house. I told him about the garret and then he asked if he might see that. I said yes, of course. Will the house really interest him?"

"Without doubt," Cameron answered crisply, "it would interest anybody and Morena's no fool."

"So I gathered."

There came another silence.

"Hester's going home with you to-night, isn't she?" Cameron asked abruptly.

"Yes," Southward replied in her most casual manner.

"Then I can't come to the garret this evening," Cameron meditated in an irritated voice. "Deuce take it! When can I see you now? May I come late, after Morena's gone?"

Southward's lashes dropped; the blue-and-black shimmer had become permanent. I don't see how you can leave your guests."

"Oh, damn my guests!" Cameron exclaimed with real impatience. "I'll wait until they've gone to bed."

"But I'm afraid that won't do," Southward objected. "Mrs. Morrow evidently sits up late."

"She does—worse luck!" Cameron agreed with an increased exasperation. He stopped with the effect of waiting for something.

No sound came from Southward but the liquid sweep of her arms.

"Can't I come after they've all gone to bed?" Cameron asked at last.

"I'm afraid that will be too late," Southward answered languidly.

"Well, I'll tell you," Cameron said, "if they haven't gone to bed by eleven, I'll make an excuse to walk to the village. I'll say I've got a headache. That means that I ought to get to your place by half-past eleven. I'll hoot as usual. You say yourself that you never get to bed before twelve. Or one. Please! Please!" His tone wheedled.

"Sure you're not falling in love with me?" Southward asked, turning the glimmer full upon him.

"Sure," Cameron replied promptly and with conviction. "Though I'm perfectly willing to admit that I'm only one jump this side of it. You see," he became suddenly serious, "I'm crazy to read the first few chapters of that novel to you."

"All right," Southward shot a triumphant smile into the dark. "If I don't hear your whistle at half-past, I'll know that you're not coming."

"You'll hear it all right," Cameron promised. "Praises be—they've started a fire," he added after a long silence.

Southward stopped swimming for a moment and lifted herself half out of the water. A faint under-surface flutter of hands served to sustain her.

Floating, his hands clasped under his head, Cameron contemplated her. "By George, I never saw anything like you," he said in a baffled tone. "You're like a duck. You're better than a duck—you're a fish."

The spark of light in the centre of the grassy camp-circle had become a flash, a huge high sheaf of flame. A succession of silhouettes, sharply-cut, circled about it. Their shadows, vague but monstrous, were thrown against the trees. "Some fire!" Southward commented, "what's more to the point, they're beginning to set the table. Dinner will taste pretty good after this long swim."

They gathered about the big deal table and ate everything that Ling brought them. The dinner was a noisy and successful affair. Afterwards they drew the steamer-chairs close about the fire, smoked and talked until a distant red glimmer predicated a moon. Southward sat on the ground, her back to the fire drying her hair. Conversation flew briskly all the time. At moments it pulled away from the present and made little dashing forays into the past. There were allusions to people and places that Southward and Hester did not know. These excursions were only momentary, but Southward listened to them with a keen interest, Hester with her shy politeness. At times they glanced off in a consideration of events to indulge in personalities. Then nicknames came out. Invidious comparisons were made, uncomplimentary adjectives applied. Smith it appeared was "the I. W. W.," Fearing "the Reformer," O'Reilly "the Bull-Fighter," and Cameron "the Cow Boy."

"I say," Morena O'Reilly burst out, "let's give a costume-dance here before we leave—invite everybody."

"You're on," agreed Dwight. "We can hire that hall in the Library."

"Let's get up one of our deservedly famous groups," Mrs. Morrow suggested.

"No," John Smith said decisively. "That's too complicated down here where it's so hard to get materials. And then it puts it up to everybody so. Let's all go on our own. In New York," he went on to explain to Hester, "there are a succession of costume-parties every winter. We always go in a group in uniform

costumes. One year we went to the Quatre-Arts as Norsemen—who had captured a Baccante. We entered, the four of us, in bearskins, winged helmets, and bare legs, carrying Azile on a shield. She wore a leopard skin with grapes in her hair. She looked wonderful. It really was an extraordinary picture. And then again we went as a band of circus performers, another time as a group of Pierrots and Pierrettes."

"That was in the spring," Fearing interpolated, "and the ball was held in a hotel in lower Fifth Avenue. We all dressed at a house on South Washington Square. It was a beautiful soft night and the trees were about half-leaved. The electric lights were shining through them. We went across the Square—running and leaping, playing snap the whip—all those white costumes, picked with black in the midst of that luminous green—well, it was one of the things you want to paint."

"It must have been wonderful," Hester said. "We have had fancy-dress parties here occasionally; but they are not interesting. How I would like to see a really beautiful masked ball."

"Come to New York and we'll show you one," Fearing offered.

John looked at Hester for an instant as for a new point of view. "You ought to go as——" He jumped to his feet suddenly. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement to make." He paused and smiled the whimsical smile that was so typical of him in moments of complete relaxation. "And that is that we have with us to-night the original princess of all the fairy-tales you read when you were children. I'm going to ask Miss Crowell—purely in the interests of authenticity—to take down her hair."

Hester started. She stared at Smith in the extreme of social terror. She turned pale.

"She won't do it!" Smith's tone continued to maintain its light note. But he turned his eyes from Hester's frightened face and that lightness was now obviously a little forced. "Unless her boss commands her. I appeal to Miss—to Southward for help."

Southward's face broke into its most mischievous smile. "Sure, I'll make her!" she asserted. "Stand up, Hester!"

"*Southward!*" Hester said. "You know I couldn't."

"Yes, you can," Southward urged, inflexible but smiling. "My hair's down, isn't it? Stand up!"

And Hester, a cowed, bowed, trembling figure, stood up. Southward placed herself on one side and Smith on the other. Smith reached towards one of the big silver hairpins; but before he touched it, he withdrew his hand. "You take it down, Southward."

Southward removed the hairpins. The long serpent of Hester's braid slipped to the ground. "I guess we'll loosen it, John," Southward said. Hester made an inarticulate protest but Southward's hurrying fingers fairly flew, tearing the strands apart. Suddenly she released the whole mass, stepped away. Hester stood in the firelight, sheathed in a glittering golden mail.

Coos of admiration came from the two women.

"Good Lord, that is wonderful!" O'Reilly exclaimed admiringly. He had apparently all the Latin's love of blond hair. He arose and walked around Hester. Hester's downcast face was blushing now—but she smiled.

"Now may I put it up?" she appealed not to Southward but to John Smith.

"Certainly not," that gentleman denied emphatically. "You're to keep it down all the rest of the evening."

Hester sank into her chair. Southward reached over her, tied together at the back the strands that would have fallen into her eyes.

"I have it," Mrs. Morrow said in a tone of triumph. "Boadicea—whichever she was!"

"No," differed Morena, "Undine."

"Should you ask me?" announced Ripley Fearing, "Cordelia."

"Cordelia, it is," decided John Smith.

"I wanted to get that awful dress covered up," he murmured under cover of this friendly controversy, to Edith Hale. "You remember I wrote you about meeting her in the woods that first night. She wore a yellow mandarin's coat set with little mirrors and her braid all but dragged on the ground. It was marvellous with the background of trees and grass. I didn't think she was human. The next time I saw her, she was in a terrible country-dress. I never was so disappointed in my life. You could do some missionary work there, Edith, just telling her what to wear."

"Well, what do you think of them?" Southward asked the instant they gained the big square room which she had decided to share with Hester.

"Oh, of course," Hester said, starting to unhook her dress, "they're the most interesting people I ever met in my life. It's awfully hard to say what you think when you're thinking so many things at once. I'm almost dazed with all I've listened to. What is most wonderful to me is the ease with which they talk to each other—it made me talk too. Why, I told that Mr. Fearing something I'd never told anybody. And you know how quiet I always

am in company. They all seem to understand each other so—and to love each other. There was such a frankness—they joke so much.”

“Yes,” Southward agreed. But it was evident that she was not interested in these abstract aspects of the group. “What do you think of Mrs. Morrow?” she demanded abruptly. She seated herself on the bed and with swift strong jerks began to pull at the lacings of her shoes.

Hester did not reply for a moment. She had finished unhooking. Absently she met her own absent gaze in the glass. Then she pulled the dress off over her head, talking through its folds all the time. “I don’t know,” she admitted in a baffled tone. “She puzzles me as much as any human being I ever met. She fascinates me. I can’t take my eyes off her, especially when she’s dancing. In a way I like her. But I found myself sort of—doubting her sincerity. One moment, she seemed all surface and the next she was deep as the bottomless pond in Wenett.”

“She’s deep all right,” Southward agreed. “I think you’ve got her number there. But she is fascinating. And a pippin. And the most wonderful dancer I ever saw in my life.” Southward slipped off the high canopied bed where she had been sitting and in one vigorous pull that ripped the snappers open, and in another vigorous fling that threw it off on to the floor, rid herself of her long, slim gown. “I hate her though,” she added, proceeding at the same pace.

“*Hate her!*” Hester echoed, stopping to stare. “What do you mean? What did she do?”

“Nothing,” Southward answered. Corsetless, her disrobing seemed to take but three more swift movements. Over shoulders and back as slim and warmly brown as a young boy’s, she slipped her simple square-necked nightgown. Her bronzed body showed gold through its filmy folds.

“That’s the funny part of it. She didn’t do anything. And she was awfully nice to me. For that matter, I was nice to her. But I hate her just the same. And she hates me all right.” A faint glimmer came into Southward’s eyes. Moving over to the glass, she pulled the pins out of her hair. Released, the two flat wads at the side turned slowly over and fell onto her bare shoulders—like the flow of some glistening melted metal.

“Oh, you lady of kingdoms,” Hester smiled faintly, “how it delights you to have a female hate you!”

“And you—lady of kingdoms yourself—how it delights you to

have one love you!" Southward retorted. "You liked Miss Hale. I could see that."

"I thought she was sweet," Hester answered with enthusiasm. "And I felt that she liked me. Anyway she was awfully kind. She's very beautiful, don't you think?"

"Yes," Southward said, tearing the comb through her unbrushed hair until it hung straight and satiny to her waist. "And yet not exactly beautiful either. She's wonderfully regular—as far as her features go—and all that. But there's something unhealthy about her."

"She doesn't seem robust," Hester coincided. "Still she must have what is beauty for me; for I love to look at her."

"Oh, by the way," Southward burst out, braiding her hair with lightning swift twists of her efficient fingers, "did you guess the secret of Mrs. Morrow's name?"

"Her name?" Hester queried. "What name? Morrow?"

"No. Azile." All Southward's humorous malice shone in her smile. "I got it soon after I first heard it. As sure as you're sitting there, she was christened Eliza and changed it to Azile. Dwight told me she had a rich old aunt Eliza."

"Do you really think so? Eliza—Azile. Well, it certainly sounds that way." But this did not apparently entertain Hester as much as it did Southward. "What do you think of the new men?" she interrogated in her turn. "Mr. Fearing and Mr. O'Reilly."

"I like them both," Southward answered, "although I suppose Mr. O'Reilly is more my sort. He's a good-looking thing, isn't he?"

"Stunning! Every girl in this town will be dead in love with him before the summer's over—all those that aren't already crazy about Mr. Cameron or Mr. Smith. Mr. Fearing reminded me of what Matt must have been when he was young. It never occurred to me to think of Matt as a young man before. Some day I'm going to ask him to get out all the daguerreotypes and tin-types he's got of himself. I'd like to see them."

"I bet he was a looker," Southward said sleepily from the bed into which she had just hopped. "Say, Hetter. Those two women are in for an uncomfortable time. If I know anything at all about Cape Cod weather, we're going to get a Northeaster by about tomorrow night."

CHAPTER VIII

"LAND, this is the worst tempest we've had this summer," remarked Mrs. Drake. "It's an August twister. They'll be sopping wet when they git here."

"It's pretty bad," Southward admitted, flying into the dining-room and back. "But they'll be dry enough. They own every possible contrivance for keeping out the cold and rain. You never saw such a collection of rain-coats, sport-coats, automobile wraps, and steamer-rugs in your life."

"Well, all I know is I wouldn't take a two-mile drive in this pelting rain for a farm down East," Mrs. Drake maintained.

"And I'd like nothing better than to walk that distance in it," Southward said. "I love to be out in a storm like this."

"Well, you certainly are a strange girl, Southward," her grandmother rejoined. "You do like the queerest things. Hark! Ain't that wheels I hear? Or is it the wind? Land, I can't tell."

Southward did not answer immediately. But she went over to the door, opened it a crack and stood with her head bent. It was five days since her introduction to the camp on Long Pond; and for the last two of those days it had rained. It was one of those storms that seem like an attack of mania on nature's part. The soggy earth looked dilapidated: The garden lay flat as though mown, the flowers had been beaten to a pulp. The wind seemed to be blowing from every direction at once. It formed rallying-spots about the trees and tortured them out of shape, pulling branches from their sockets and stripping them of their leaves.

Inside, there was every possible contrast of warmth, light, seemliness, and quiet. A fire crackled in the big deep old fireplace in Mrs. Drake's room. All the bottles had disappeared from the stand near the bed. In their places stood a pewter bowl of golden marigolds and blue bachelor-buttons, a high slim pitcher of Canton medallion and a high slim goblet of old cut glass. More flowers filled the old glasses that replaced the bottles on the narrow high mantel; they were reflected in the green-grey depths of the old mirror above them. The whole lower floor had been put to careful rights. The parlour, with its welter of black-walnut furniture, its orgy of hand-made bric-à-brac, had been dusted. The dining-room,

the table set with a white cloth and china of old-blue India, showed an equally fleckless state.

Mrs. Drake, like a freshly-coloured mummy wrapped in a blue-cotton kimono, her long yellow braids pinned flat to her head, was propped high in bed. She wore a complete set of jewelry in black enamel with pearls, earrings, a chain with a locket, a brooch, bracelets. She was showing what for her was a high degree of excitement. She listened again to the uproar outside.

"I guess it's only the storm," she decided.

"Yes," Southward agreed with an accent of uncertainty. "No," she added decisively, "there's the carriage. I do hope Lysander'll ride them right up to the step. Yes, that's what he's doing. Trust Ly." She opened the door again. A comber of wind swept through the room, curled up the chimney, sucking with it a spume of sparks.

"We've been worried about you," she called.

Mrs. Morrow's exotic face—its sea-blondness more accented than ever by the moisture—peered over the black rubber flap of the buggy.

"We're all right," she called cheerily. The carriage stopped. Lysander leaped out and assisted her to the ground. She came running to the door, her face rosy with the pelting wet, partially obscured by a veil of green-gold ringlets. Lysander lifted Mrs. Boardman out. Both women wore army-ponchos and big army-hoods.

"Oh, thank you so much, Lysander!" Southward called. "Come in and get warm, won't you?"

"Thanks! Don't know but what I will," Lysander answered, peering at her for a brief instant from under his yellow tarpaulin hat.

"Oh, do!" Mrs. Morrow called peremptorily, turning swiftly towards him. "Oh, do!" she added entreatingly, smiling.

"All right," Lysander said. He took off his tarpaulin coat just outside the door. The two women removed their ponchos. They emerged perfectly dry in walking-suits of dark silk.

Mrs. Drake's head did not move in answer to the gracious bows of her guests. But, "I'm glad to meet you," she said cordially. "You must be chilled to the bone after that long drive. Set over there by the fire. I had Southward git out some of my elderberry wine for you. Be you wet?"

"Oh, no," Mrs. Boardman responded pleasantly. "We bundled up carefully." Southward took the ponchos from them, handed them to Lysander who bore them with an accustomed air to the

kitchen; then she poured out some wine from an old glass bottle that stood surrounded with goblets on a painted tin tray.

Mrs. Boardman took one of the comfortable rockers by the fire. She put her hand out eagerly for one of the glasses.

"That's delicious," she cooed, sipping delicately. "I haven't had any elderberry wine since I was a girl." But her eye went first to the bottle, then to the tray, then to the goblet in her hand.

"I allus put it up myself when I was up and around but now Southward she does it." Mrs. Drake explained, "I like to have it handy to offer folks. Southward makes it awful tasty."

Mrs. Morrow had in the meantime taken the other chair at the fireplace. She tossed off the elderberry wine at a gulp.

"What darling stuff!" she commented. "I never tasted it before. It's a doll's dream of a cocktail. Oh, here's your drink, Mr. Manning." She arose and handed Lysander the remaining glass.

Lysander's face was as pink as her own; his blue eyes even more brilliant, his hair crisped in thick golden waves all over his head. Mrs. Morrow watched him as he threw down the elderberry wine.

"Why don't you ever come over to the camp and go in swimming with us, Mr. Manning?" she asked.

"Thanks, I will sometime," Lysander assented. "Cameron seems to like the water—I hear he goes in often late at nights." His steady gaze veered for a moment from Mrs. Morrow, just touched Southward's immobile face, came back to Mrs. Morrow's sparkling look.

"Heavens, yes!" Mrs. Morrow said. "He takes a swim every night just as the rest of us are going to bed."

"Who took Miss Hale to Hester's, Ly?" Southward asked.

"Baxter," Lysander answered—"Well, I must be going," he concluded abruptly. "Good-bye."

Before anybody could speak, he had slipped out of the door. They watched him leap into the buggy. In another instant, the wheels had ceased to scrape turning round, he was driving rapidly away.

"What a stunning-looking creature!" Mrs. Morrow commented. "In that tarpaulin, he looks really heroic—a knight of old and that sort of thing. I suppose though in his regular dress-up clothes, he's a scream."

"No," Southward answered decisively. "Lysander's never smart, but he's always picturesque. He has that knack. And in his working-clothes he's bully."

"Well, I'm quite crazy about him," Mrs. Morrow admitted with her most frivolous accent.

"Well, I'm quite crazy about this glass," Mrs. Boardman interrupted, rising to deposit it on the tray. "I suppose," she went on casually, "that your house is just full of such lovely old treasures."

"There's a lot of old stuff scattered about," Mrs. Drake answered. "It used to be all up-attic until Southward fixed the garret over. Now it's all down on the next floor. Southward and Hester lugged most of it down themselves—like to killed them! I don't care for them old antiques that folks is so crazy about nowadays. So when I married Nat, I jess put them all up-attic. I like furniture to be bright and shiny and stylish."

Mrs. Boardman smiled her mechanical conversational smile, but Mrs. Morrow showed an appreciation of Mrs. Drake's taste that was genuinely mirthful. Southward busied herself collecting the goblets on the tray. Mrs. Morrow accompanied her to the kitchen.

"And those earrings—that locket and bracelet you're wearing—they must be very old," Mrs. Boardman went on. "They're nice—very nice—very nice indeed."

"Yes, they belonged to my grandmother," Mrs. Drake said placidly. "Southward thinks they're handsome too. She's jess possessed to wear them. Allus teasing me to let her. But I tell her black's too old for a young girl."

"Onyx and pearl, are they not?" Mrs. Boardman inquired.

"Yes, and the locket's got some of my grandfather's hair in it—they cut it off when he lay in his casket. The bracelet's got a strand of my mother's baby-hair and my sister Sabry's and mine. Them earrings is most too heavy. I don't wear them very often. I declare I don't know how folks used to wear the clothes they did."

Mrs. Boardman had by this time turned sideways from the fire. The light poured placatingly over her correct copper-plate profile and through the structure, elaborately puffed and plaited, of her grey hair. It could do nothing to soften the expression of the lineless mask of her face or the hard enamel of her keen grey eyes. Those eyes darted quick glances everywhere—at the beautiful mantel, the windows with their twenty-four panes of old glass, the door with the graceful latch, the bull's-eye glass above. Her glance lingered but a moment—and without change—when it penetrated the jungle of atrocities in the parlour—and it did not return. But she examined critically the old embroidered hand-screen that she pulled finally between her and the blaze.

"What a wonderful old house!" she said when Mrs. Drake ran down. "How I envy you! Azile," she commanded her daughter who returned with Southward at this moment, "do look at this screen and that old pewter candle-holder."

"I am looking at them," Azile said without a trace of expression in her voice, "and dying with envy."

"Perhaps you'll show us some of what your grandmother calls 'the old stuff' upstairs?" Mrs. Boardman continued, addressing Southward.

"I'll take you all over the house to-morrow," Southward offered, "if you like. The light is too bad now. I hope by that time it will be pleasant again."

"I shall be delighted," Mrs. Boardman said with fervour.

A moment's quiet intervened.

"Be all those puffs your own hair?" Mrs. Drake demanded suddenly, directing her glass-marble gaze at Mrs. Boardman.

"Why, *grandmother!*" Southward exclaimed in a shocked tone, casting her lashes over the blue-and-black glimmer that immediately filled her eyes. "You mustn't ask questions like that."

"Why, it's the first question I've asked," Mrs. Drake protested. "And Mrs. Boardman's been asking me ever so many. Haven't you?" She appealed to her guest for social rehabilitation.

"I certainly have," that lady replied. Her tone was gallant, but there was a suspicion of a flush on her faded skin. "And as I intend to ask a great many more, I shall take the precaution first of answering all Mrs. Drake's questions. No, these puffs are not my own hair."

"I thought they wasn't," Mrs. Drake said in a tone that betrayed gratification at her own perspicacity. "They're handsome though. There was a time after I had typhoid fever when I was a young girl that my hair came out so I had to buy some false. Well, I never had anything more handy than that switch. I took an awful lot of comfort out of it. I could do it in my lap and see how it looked, fore I put it on. Your own hair never does go up so good."

Southward's lashes continued to conceal accessions of the blue-and-black glimmer.

"You're quite right," Mrs. Boardman agreed. She had regained her *aplomb*. "Live hair is always out of order but dead hair always stays put."

"I was almost sorry when my hair began to grow again," Mrs. Drake said. "But, land, how it did grow. It got to be a perfect nuisance. My sister Sabry bought her switch when she was forty. Her hair turned early but mine never did. She put on eyeglasses

when she was forty-two. She had all her teeth pulled when she was forty-five. 'Thank God, that's all attended to,' she used to say. 'With spectacles, a good switch, and a false set, top and bottom, there ain't nothing more I can worry about.' Your teeth are beautiful and you don't wear glasses, do you?"

With a gracious smile, Mrs. Boardman held up the lorgnette which hung on a golden chain.

"I don't call them things glasses," said Mrs. Drake. "You're an awful young-looking woman," she went on critically. "You don't look a day over forty-five. Yet you must be with a daughter like that. City-folks is allus so much younger-looking than country-folks."

"Well, that's very curious," Mrs. Boardman almost beamed. "I was going to say the same thing to you. Country people seem to keep the colour of youth so much longer than we city-folk. You have a wonderful complexion, Mrs. Drake."

"Yes," Mrs. Drake agreed tranquilly. "Ain't I? I've allus had a good skin. So'd my sister Sabry; there warn't one wrinkle on her face—nor when she laid in her casket and she was eighty-four. I've allus had a great deal of colour too. Jess as high, no matter if I was sick. When I was a young girl, I did so want to be pale; folks allus look so genteel when they're pale. Oh, here you be, Nat? I'll make you acquainted with my husband, Mis' Boardman and Mis' Morrow."

The ladies bowed.

Mr. Drake standing in the doorway showed with a cruel distinctness the angle at which his crippled back reduced his stature almost to half. Yet he bowed with an appropriate ceremony and with a touch of elegance.

"We're glad to see you," he said heartily. "We worried about you all last evening. And when the rain grew into a tempest, mother wanted that I should harness up and go over and get you in the middle of the night. But Southward, she said, no. She said she was sure you wouldn't want to be routed out at that hour. Was you able to keep dry and warm?"

"Oh, yes. All day long, we stayed in the cabin. When your granddaughter came over to visit us, she warned Mr. Smith that the chimney needed mending. He fixed it the next day so, fortunately, we kept warm and dry. Only the cabin was so small and we got so tired after a while of playing cards. I fancy the men were relieved enough to be rid of us. Certainly I was glad to get under a roof. Camping in rainy weather is not for a woman of my years."

Mrs. Boardman threw a gracious smile to each of her three hosts. The smile showed all her white teeth, which, as Mrs. Drake had observed, were in a singularly good state of preservation, notwithstanding occasional spatters of gold. But however gracious, her smile never changed the unwinking hardness of her bright eyes.

"You must be as hungry as a bear after that long drive," Mrs. Drake surmised.

And "Supper 'most ready, Charlotte?" Mr. Drake called.

"In a moment," Charlotte's husky voice answered. "I'll ring the bell when."

Both ladies protested that they were not hungry, but they arose with alacrity when the bell sounded. They stood the shock of Charlotte's sinister aspect without a change of expression nor a lessening of the high cordial note that they had maintained ever since their arrival.

"Oh, this is so like New England," Mrs. Boardman said enthusiastically when they seated themselves at the table. "So much food and such delicious food." Her eyes went from the pot of beans to the little platter that held a cube of black and wrinkled pork, to the generous loaf of brown bread, the corn, all steaming, to the dishes of piccalilli and preserve, to the high round layer-cake. But it was on the dishes, not the food, that her bright stare rested longest. And before the meal was over, she had drawn from Southward an account of all the things in the house, even to the three barrels of Lowestoft that she had found a few years before in the cellar.

Mrs. Boardman's conversation continued to run along these lines after they had left the table. She drew Southward into a discussion of her neighbours; of the possibility of antique treasure in their attics; she suggested tentatively at last that some of these things might be purchased.

Southward's answers had been for the most part mere brief, non-committal phrases. At this, however, she said in a casual tone:

"I don't know of course. But I fancy they're all like us—poor as Job's turkey but as unlikely to sell anything that belonged in the family as their own arms and legs."

Conversation languished temporarily. But before the evening had passed, Mrs. Boardman regained her hard brightness. At an early hour, however, she admitted to fatigue and allowed herself to be shown to her bedroom.

"I have no idea of going to bed so soon," Mrs. Morrow pro-

tested gaily. And indeed she sailed upstairs in the wake of Southward's candle with Southward's own speed and ease.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, stopping short as Southward went about the garret lighting up. "What an extraordinary effect! It's like a stage-setting. It's a cross between a circus-tent and a museum. How did you girls come to do it?"

"Oh, we wanted a place where nobody else could possibly come. There was and still is a curious sense of adventure and secrecy about it."

"Oh!" Mrs. Morrow said, "Oh!" and again "Oh! It's amazing. It's unbelievable. How I wish Mr. Cameron could see it."

Southward smiled inscrutably in the opposite direction. But without comment she went from candle to lamp. Furtively she picked up the revolver from the centre-table and concealed it in the drawer of the secretary.

Mrs. Morrow continued to stand in the middle of the room, a pivoting bunch of gasps and adjectives. "My dear, I don't believe you realise how good all this old furniture is. Mother can give you an idea. It's not only fine but it's rare."

"Yes," Southward answered coolly, "I understand a little about it. Hester and I have read some of the books. All of this is not colonial Chippendale and Sheraton, you know. It was brought from England. Here, put this coat on." She drew a Chinese sa'am from one of the chairs. "There's no fire here and I'm afraid you'll catch cold." She herself drew on the tomato-coloured prince's coat.

Mrs. Morrow pulled on the sa'am. Its cool sage-green, meshed with a dim figuring, made a charming contrast with her pale-gold hair and her pale-grey eyes.

"These Chinese things are wonders," she commented. "I suppose you'll wear some of them to the costume-party?"

"No," Southward said, "I've worn them so much here, they'd be no novelty. I'll get something else."

"You ought to wear a boy's costume of some sort," Mrs. Morrow suggested. "You're the only one of us who has the figure for it. I do so wish you would let me bring Dwight see this attic," she went on. "He's so susceptible to what he calls the 'spirit of place.' He says that an atmosphere will start a story in his mind much quicker than a person or an event. I think this would stimulate him enormously. Edith would love it too."

"Miss Hale must come sometime," Southward said with composure. "Have a cigarette?" She pushed the box across the table with one hand and an ash-tray with the other. Mrs. Morrow

lighted a cigarette at one of the candles, puffed a moment in silence, her eyes meditative. Southward sat in her favourite position, stretched on the *chaise-longue*, her hands clasped at the back of her head. She manipulated her cigarette with her lips.

"The reason it's so wonderful as a bit of atmosphere," Mrs. Morrow took up her thesis again, "is that it has a real flavour of this country. I suppose I appreciate that because I've lived in so many countries."

"Where have you lived?" Southward asked idly. She removed the cigarette, sent a flock of smoke-bubbles curving through the air, flicked off the ash with a tiny vigorous slap of her little finger.

"Lived!" Mrs. Morrow repeated in a despairing tone, "everywhere. I've been somewhere else always. London, Paris, the Riviera, Florence, Rome, Etaples, Malta, Cairo—more in Paris of course than anywhere else—except New York."

"How does New York compare with foreign cities?"

"Pretty well. I'd rather live in New York than any other American city, although of course San Francisco and New Orleans are more picturesque and Boston has more taste. It's a pretty good American version of Paris—commercialised though."

"People say," Southward said, drawing up to the table and flicking a match back and forth over its surface, "that you can live very inexpensively abroad. You're always hearing stories about it. Is that right?"

"Oh, yes. I mean, no. What I really do mean is yes *and* no. It's expensive for me to live anywhere—especially in Paris. But of course people do live abroad on incredibly small sums, especially on the Continent. And you get so much more for your money. I suppose it's a matter of temperament though."

"Oh!" This was an exclamation, as though out of a careless talk something of immediate interest had come to Southward's mind. "Where are the best oculists—I mean for anybody who wanted a specialist?"

"Oh, Germany by long odds. We're up on the matter because mother had some trouble with her eyes and had to go there."

"I see." Southward openly reflected on something of which she did not speak. "It's a long way to Germany," she concluded, half to herself.

"By the way, there's a big German specialist—Greinschmidt—coming over here this year."

"Is there?" Southward said. "I must remember that. It's for my aunt Miss Howes."

"But speaking of economy on the Continent," Mrs. Morrow went

on, "Mother says——" Her long curling lashes dropped over her eyes as she leaned forward to put her cigarette-end in the ash-receiver. She paused an instant to poke the fire out. And in that instant her lashes concealed the fact that her eyes fixed on another cigarette-end there. It bore in gold letters the initials D. C. "—that you can live in Italy a hundred years on a thousand dollars," she concluded without a change of expression. "But again I say, it all depends on whether you're the kind of person who can economise or not."

CHAPTER IX

"It's so comfortable here," Edith Hale said, her melancholy smile seeming to throw a faint lambent glow upwards on her still face. "And so restful after all that noise and confusion." She looked about the quiet gentle room with its mid-Victorian atmosphere of faded pictures, faded furniture, and faded bric-à-brac. "I'm glad you rescued me."

Mrs. Crowell, grimly silent, darning steadily by the light of the reading-lamp on the big centre-table, spoke.

"You'll be gladder later," she prophesied. "I think the tempest'll break before morning; but it's going to be worse before it gets better." Her grey glance shot across the table and leaped in an instant over Miss Hale's entire figure. It began with her hair carefully coiled and rippled, the soft gown of dull Chinese silk, the bare round forearms and the long hands lying in statuesque idleness across her lap, the little feet lifting, by means of a footstool, smart patent-leather shoes with brilliant steel-buckles into the light.

"I'm glad too," Hester said. And Hester looked glad. Her gladness filled her eyes with a perpetual glow; it curved her lips into a perpetual smile. A faint colour played like a flame in her cheek. "I don't think I could have slept to-night, thinking of you over there. The men will be all right; they can sleep in the cabin."

"Oh, yes," Miss Hale agreed. "There's no necessity of bothering about them. Now that they've got us off their hands, they'll really enjoy the storm. Last night, Dwight, who stood the confinement with less patience than any of us, actually went in bathing."

"I should have thought he'd had a chill," Mrs. Crowell declared.

"Anybody else would have," Miss Hale agreed, "but he has extraordinary vitality. Then he goes in every night. In fact they all have remarkable vitality. John has the most wonderful physique in many ways. But Dwight is a born athlete. Oh," she gave a long sigh and again swept her glance about the pleasant, gentle room. "You don't know how glad it is to see space again—these two nights sleeping in that little cabin—the three of us—were dreadful—were——" She paused and a sudden violence rent her expression "—horrible. I'm accustomed to read late—

indeed I can get to sleep no other way—but I did not on Mrs. Boardman's account. Oh, those long hours that I could not sleep—listening to the melancholy rain." Her look grew almost wild. "You will never know what good Samaritans you were to bring me here." She glanced towards the piano whose rectangular black bulk filled one corner of the room. "Do you play, Miss Crowell?"

"No," Hester said regretfully, "I don't. Mother does though. Mother had me take lessons once—but I didn't seem to get along——"

"Hester hasn't any gumption," Mrs. Crowell interposed.

"But Mother used to play beautifully," Hester went on hastily. "She's given it up though."

"Oh, that's too bad." Miss Hale was sympathetic. She looked questioningly at Mrs. Crowell.

Mrs. Crowell answered the look. "I did keep it up at first. And then housework hardened and stiffened my hands—I lost my touch. I sort of got out of the way of it." Her marble mask suddenly broke: light ran into it; fire. "Do you play, Miss Hale?" she asked with an intensity of feeling that was almost fierce.

"Yes," Miss Hale answered directly, "I won't say that I play 'a little' for I think that I play very well. In fact, I introduced the subject in hopes that you'd let me try your piano. I haven't seen one for two weeks now."

"Oh, do," Mrs. Crowell begged. "I can't remember when we've had any music here. When was it, Hester?"

Hester had already jumped to her feet, was opening the piano; "I was trying to think. Seems to me nobody's played here since Molly Allen brought little Jennie over last spring. Oh, I'm so glad we're going to have some music."

Miss Hale seated herself on the stool, ran her hands up and down the notes with a practised touch. She had not flattered herself in saying that she played well. She played extraordinarily well. She was in fact a finished, almost a distinguished pianist. Her touch was soft and liquid. Hester had none of her kind of music; and so she rambled at will through a repertoire that was prevaillingly minor. She played for an hour; and during that time there was not another sound in the room. Her own face grew rapt as mentally she penetrated further and further into that country of dreams which her own fingers opened for her. Hester lay back in the big old chair, her eyes shut, her face the face of one who sees beyond space and time. Mrs. Crowell made for a long time a pretence of keeping up her work; then gradually she slowed. Suddenly, half-way through a stitch, her needle stopped. She

dropped the stocking on the table. She did not lean back as Hester did, but her elbows went down on the arm of her chair and her forehead dropped into the palm of her long white hand. They sat thus, mother and daughter, for a long, long time.

"Oh, I can't tell you how I've enjoyed that," Hester said with a long sigh when her guest finally arose from the piano. "It's been Heaven."

"I know," Miss Hale agreed, "I've been hungry for music too many times not to understand. I'm coming over here often."

Mrs. Crowell said nothing. She took up her darning again. Her fingers pulled the needle out of the uncompleted stitch.

"Will you tell me when you want to go to bed?" Hester asked. "You must be very tired."

"I think I'll go now," Miss Hale answered frankly. "As a rule, it doesn't make any difference when I go to bed. I'm rarely drowsy and as I said I always have to read myself to sleep anyway. But to-night I feel really tired—it's those two nights of broken rest, I suppose."

"You're to have my room," Hester said as after bidding Mrs. Crowell good night Miss Hale started up the stairs.

"Oh, I don't want to turn you out," Miss Hale protested.

"You're not doing that exactly," Hester explained. "Mother never sleeps upstairs. I always do. Sometimes I sleep in one room, sometimes another. It really makes no difference to me where I am. This way, please."

She set the candle down on the dresser, lighted a little glass lamp at the reading-stand: "I always read at night too, you see."

"What a charming room," Edith Hale commented, gazing about her. "All this white is very refreshing, such a— Oh!" The exclamation was so sudden and deep-toned that it made Hester jump. "That door leads to a sleeping-balcony, doesn't it" There was a new note in her voice and a strong one—of tremendous relief.

"Oh, yes. There's a couch out there. I often sleep on it when the weather's fine."

"Good!" Again there was emotion in Miss Hale's voice: delight this time, but a delight almost wild. She went to the door and pressed her face against the glass panel, shading her eyes from the light. "It's still raining," she sighed. That wild note died down. Her voice went dead.

"Yes." Hester listened. "But I'm sure mother is right. She has a sixth sense when it comes to weather. This shower will be bad, but it will be the clearing-up one."

"It's so romantic to sleep out of doors," Miss Hale said in a

disjointed way. It was evident that her mind was not on what she was saying. "Especially on a balcony. That always makes me think of Romeo and Juliet and mediæval romance—and then I love a door in a chamber, opening on the world." She seemed to catch herself up. "This is such a nice white—this room. It doesn't glare at all. And it's so simple and quaint. It's not conventional exactly—it has a kind of clean femininity—I don't mean femininity exactly—I mean——" She frowned gently, labouring with her phrases, "whatever corresponds to virility. John would like this room."

"Would he?" Hester asked in a surprised voice. She herself looked about as though from a new point of view. "It is simple of course. I don't like *things* you know. Southward and I decided at least five years ago that the trouble with women is that they're too much tyrannised over by things. We decided to free ourselves. And we've done it. I can truly say that, aside from some pictures, pictures of people of course, I don't care for any one thing more than for any other."

"How wonderful!" commented Edith Hale. She sank into the low rocker and stared at Hester, her brows knit. "John would love that. It's the doctrine he's always preaching. Now I love things. They have to be beautiful things but, granted that, I feel that they have every claim on my eternal love and care. My home is full of Lares that are very dear to me. They're necessary to my happiness. It makes a great difference to me what surrounds me. I have been in places where I couldn't sleep because the things were so bad."

"Is there anything I can do for you? Anything I can get?" Hester asked.

"Nothing except a book," Miss Hale answered. "But I see there are many here."

"These are all my favourites," Hester pointed to one of the shelves.

Miss Hale moved over to the dresser first. Hester watched her remove from a black-leather bag ivory toilet-articles, a white nightgown delicately fine, a rose-coloured *negligée* exquisitely soft.

"Then I'm perfectly comfy," Miss Hale announced. "Oh, what a love of a baby!" She took up one of the pictures from the dresser. "And what a lovely girl!" She took up another.

"The girl is—or was—my sister Beatrice," Hester answered steadily, "and the baby is—or was—her little daughter Bee."

"They're both dead?" Miss Hale questioned.

"Three years ago," Hester answered briefly. "They died within a week of each other. That explains my mother."

"It would explain almost anything," Miss Hale said. She studied the pictures carefully, one at a time. Hester stood watching her. "We live through these things," was Miss Hale's final comment. "But God only knows how—or why——" She came to Hester immediately, her hand outstretched. "I like you," she said. Then as though following a sudden impulse, she drew Hester to her and kissed her. Last, as though trying to change the subject, "You'll let me design that masquerade-costume for you, won't you?"

"Oh, yes," Hester agreed, "gladly. I'm perfectly helpless myself, you know."

"What do you think of her, mother?" Hester asked a moment later, after rejoining Mrs. Crowell in the parlour.

"Very pleasant woman. And plays beautifully. Very much of a lady. Fine figure. Very genteel. Very stylish. How old should you say she was, Hester?" Mrs. Crowell's voice was unusually mild.

Hester's brow furrowed. "I never could guess ages," she said in a perplexed tone. "If I like people, they seem young. If I don't like them, I can't tell anything about them. I should say she was getting towards thirty-five."

"She's forty-five if she's a day," Mrs. Crowell took it up crisply. "Fifteen years older than you at least, Hester, and she looks five years younger. That's because she's taken some interest in her personal appearance. She knows how to walk and how to stand and how to do her hair and above all how to dress. For pity's sake, Hester, don't ever sit so near her as you did to-night. She makes you look like a great, gawky, lanky old maid."

The change that came over Hester was as sudden as it was sweeping. It was as though her mother's cruel talons had gone over her face, clutching from it every soft shine, every radiant bloom. All the dull shadows leaped into prominence; all the purple contours accented themselves. She visibly wilted in her chair.

"Yes, she's cared-for looking," Hester said. Her voice had lost its tone. It was as though it came from dead lips.

"Well, I'm glad you realise that. Do watch her while she's here and see how she does it. Perhaps you can get some idea of how to dress from her. I give you five years in which to become an old woman if you don't begin to give some care to your appearance. Good Lord, is that half-past eleven? I guess I'll go to bed."

Her white slender hands, with their long cruel nails and their deft accuracy of touch, seized the stockings, rolled them quickly, turned them into square, flat pads. She stacked these carefully into her basket, picked it up, arose. "Good night," she dropped with out glancing at her daughter.

"Good night, mother," Hester answered in even tones. After Mrs. Crowell's step had stopped, she sat for a long while, sagging and expressionless, her eyes gazing straight ahead.

At last, she arose and went softly upstairs to bed. Miss Hale's door was closed but light streamed in a long yellow cone through the key-hole. That light was still there when Hester, having read herself to drowsiness, put out the lamp in her own room and shut the door.

Towards morning, Hester jerked upright in bed, pulled suddenly to wakefulness out of a deep sleep. She sat mute and moveless, listening. Then she raised her head and with lips closed drew in a long breath like an animal sensing danger through his nose. The next moment, she tumbled out of bed and lighted the lamp. Her fingers shook. For an instant after the flame steadied, she stood snuffing the air, her face perplexed. The perplexity gradually died down. She threw on a kimono, seized the lamp and went out into the hall. The door of Miss Hale's room had blown open. A terrific gust of wind came through it, flared an instant within the chimney of the lamp. But before the light could go out, Hester's swift fingers had turned the wick down. She tiptoed over to Miss Hale's room.

The bed was empty. It had been occupied though. For an instant Hester gazed about in a drowsy perplexity again. That perplexity changed suddenly to alarm and then as suddenly became relief. The door leading to the piazza swung open and shut. Hester stood mute: then she returned to her room, put down the lamp, fumbled under the pillow, withdrew her electric torch. Turning the light on, she retraced her steps, tiptoed lightly out on the balcony.

The rain had stopped. The sky had begun to clear, but the wind still mastered the earth. Great clouds were rushing from one horizon to the other. In the smooth places between, single stars—large, solitary, white—seemed to flare in the tremendous gust. But even in the second that Hester stood still, the wind began to go down. Hester threw the light gradually in the direction of the couch.

Edith Hale lay there. Her fine, brown-black hair was brushed

straight back from her brow, throwing her semi-classic features into a high relief. A thin braid trickled over one shoulder, lost itself under the bedclothes. No longer did the gentle light from her eyes, the pretty flicker of her teeth, help with their illumination. Her lips and lids lay motionless, uncoloured like carved wax. At that moment, she not only looked every one of her possible forty-five years but she looked dead.

Hester moved a terrified step nearer, then stopped; obviously her guest was breathing.

Hester returned to her room. For a long time, she did not sleep; she tossed and turned.

"Did you rest well?" Hester asked the next morning.

Miss Hale was as carefully dressed as ever in a morning gown of a cobweb delicacy. Her hair rippled low over her forehead; laces softened the line of her throat. But into the wax of her skin no colour had as yet crept; her lips were still clay.

"Oh, charmingly," she answered. "I read for a time—for a long time—and then—and then—I read——" She paused. Her eyes wandered vaguely as though by focusing on some object they could help her mind to focus. "—and then I fell asleep—fast asleep—and then—and then—and then I woke up and thought of the sleeping-balcony. That—that allured me—and I went out there and spent—and spent—and spent the rest of the night—the night. It was wonderful—the wildness of the wind and sky——"

She rambled on for a long time.

"That's nice," Hester said as she paused. But she added nothing.

CHAPTER X

MORENA O'REILLY presented himself at Long Lanes the first pleasant afternoon that followed the big storm. Slim, foreign-looking white flannels, slim white shoes, Panama hat, a strange, foreign-looking stick, he was very correct. But that correctness seemed only to accentuate his startling good looks.

Southward was walking up and down between her flower-beds, critically surveying them, when he arrived.

"I've been Baedekering all over Shayneford this morning, Miss Drake," he said, "but thus far I've seen nothing as beautiful as this. It ought to be double-starred." He stopped to survey the big square height of the house and the long rectangular sweep of the ell. "I was ordered to do this," he explained. "It's all that Dwight and John prophesied."

Southward did not follow his glance. "Yes, I suppose it's beautiful." Her tone seemed to resign itself to boredom. "But I've always lived here and I can't seem to get it from your point of view to save my life."

She led the way into the orchard and they seated themselves in the East Indian chairs there. Southward talked, with her characteristic composure, of many things. After a while, she served tea.

"Did you enjoy your visit to the camp?" O'Reilly asked.

"Enormously," Southward replied.

"We're rather a queer gang of beggars to spring on the stranger all at once," O'Reilly went on. "Untamed but healthy. Treat us well and we eat from your hand. And merry withal."

"I found you so," Southward admitted.

"This is my first excursion into New England," O'Reilly continued fluently. "I'd no idea it was like this and especially Cape Cod. I thought that Cape Cod was all sand. I did not know you had so much green or so many fresh-water ponds."

"People always think that surprising," Southward averred indifferently. "I haven't travelled enough to know much about the rest of the world. But I'm compelled reluctantly to believe the Cape must be beautiful so many sane people find it so."

O'Reilly smiled a little. But he pursued his thesis.

"It's very like Etaples in France, Le Touquet, and all the region round Boulogne. That country, just like this, attracts artists in colonies. If you were taken up at this moment and whirled across the world and set down there, you wouldn't know that you had left the Cape."

"That's one spot then," Southward said, "that I'll guarantee you I'll never visit."

O'Reilly laughed this time. And his mirth prolonged itself in the amused stare with which he contemplated her.

"Yes. I quite understand that. I'd never want to see the place again if I had to live here always."

"Where have you lived?" Southward asked. "Are you an American?"

"In a manner of speaking," O'Reilly answered, "Yes. And in a manner of speaking, no. My father was a naturalised Irishman, my mother Spanish. My family went back to Europe when I was sixteen. I've been to America several times since. After a while I began to do war-correspondence and since then I've lived anywhere or nowhere. It looks now as though I were pegged down here for a while. You never can tell though. I've the wandering foot—horizon fever—in its most virulent form and it's likely to break out any time."

Captain Drake emerged from the house and came through the orchard. "Oh, grandfather," Southward called, "Come over here! I want you to meet Mr. O'Reilly."

"You're the one that's been such a traveller," Mr. Drake said as he shook hands. "I guess more than likely you and I have seen some of the same places?"

"Well, let's compare notes," O'Reilly suggested. He transferred his Celtic twinkle to Mr. Drake's figure.

In the comparison process, the long list of Mr. Drake's voyages fitted neatly with the list, somewhat longer but not so varied, of their guest's travels. Mr. Drake's excursions had embraced the ports of the Mediterranean; had spread all over the Orient. In his own estimation, however the star experience had been a single trip into the Arctic Circle. That, he said, he had always wanted to repeat.

O'Reilly's travels had been confined to Southern Europe and Northern Africa. His star experience had been an excursion into the Sahara desert. He talked a long time and in much detail of the Balkan States to which his war divagations had several times taken him. Mr. Drake listened, absorbed.

Southward sat silent through all this. But she gave the con-

versation the attention which always she gave to concrete facts. Only when the discussion tapered towards generalities, conditions economic and commercial, did her eyes wander. She supplemented her grandfather's suggestion that O'Reilly stay to supper with a proper degree of cordiality. O'Reilly accepted with alacrity.

"All right," Mr. Drake said heartily. "You'll excuse me now. I've got to wash up."

"Your grandfather is an extraordinary man," O'Reilly commented, watching Mr. Drake's powerful shamble in the direction of the house.

"Yes," Southward agreed. "He always impresses people. I have a great admiration for him and a great friendship. That's rather unusual I think, considering that we're blood-relations and that I've lived in the house with him all my life."

"You're a Cape Cod girl?" O'Reilly asked.

"Yes, and my mother before me and her mother before her—way back. And my father's people have always lived here."

"I would say that you had some Latin somewhere," O'Reilly went on. His twinkle disappeared. He fixed her thoughtfully while he spoke. "And yet there's nothing Gallic or Spanish about you."

"No, there's no Latin blood as far as I know on either side, only Scotch and English. There's always been a family rumour of an Indian strain somewhere but I don't know how or when."

"That would account for it," O'Reilly said with an accent of satisfaction. He continued at his ease to study her.

"Account for what?" Southward demanded.

"*A je ne sais quoi*. . . . a what people describe as 'a certain something!'" Morena answered. "I don't know quite what it is—a sort of impassivity and yet not that at all. It's really surprising in such a pretty girl. Pardon this abruptness. But I suppose you know you are a pretty girl."

"A few of your sex have told me so," Southward said with equanimity. "I'm trying my best to believe it."

"Oh, you believe it all right," O'Reilly accused her. "Every expression, every movement, every gesture betrays the confidence that comes from knowing that you're pretty."

If he had expected to embarrass Southward, he must have been disappointed. "I'm sorry I don't conceal it," was Southward's composed comment.

They talked until Charlotte appeared in the door ringing the bell.

"That means supper's ready," Southward explained. "I hope I remembered to break it to you that it is supper you get, not dinner."

"Oh, I'm resigned to that," O'Reilly assured her. "In fact I don't care what it is. This New England food may be eccentric but I find it delicious. What are you going to have to-night, if it's a fair question?"

"It isn't," Southward retorted. "Not only that, but it's very bad manners. Nevertheless, I'll tell you. The day being cool you're going to have boiled dinner."

"Sounds good to me," O'Reilly said.

The downstairs rooms bore their accustomed look of disorderly housekeeping, crowded and careless though clean. Southward however maintained her usual composure. If O'Reilly was struck with the contrast of the inside of the house with its outside, his manner did not betray it. He showed much social perspicuity in his treatment of the members of the household. At the table, he continued to draw Mr. Drake out in regard to past voyages and it was apparent that Mr. Drake enjoyed the experience of a new audience. Charlotte did not speak, but she listened in the sad silence typical of her when strangers were about. Mr. O'Reilly tried again and again to edge her into the conversation, but it was like snaring some frightened forest creature. He was much more successful with Mrs. Drake when later they repaired to that lady's bedroom. Mrs. Drake responded with her usual ready artlessness to all his overtures. Sitting up in bed in one of the brilliant kimonos which she reserved for company use, she asked him an interminable series of questions, and he answered them with a fullness of detail that satisfied even her. A twinkle lay in the depths of his deep-coloured Irish eyes, a half smile flickered under the jetty moustache. In fact here the Celt, understanding, sympathetic, kindly, humorous, seemed uppermost. After a while he began to talk about his own experiences. He held Mrs. Drake and Charlotte spellbound.

"I've one favour to ask you, Miss Drake," he interpolated suddenly at the end of a story. "You said something last night about letting me see this house. I would be obliged if you would show it to me. It's not alone because it's beautiful that it interests me . . . it's because it's characteristic."

"All right," Southward said. "I'll have to get a lamp."

She took him through the disused kitchen of the main house to the front where the wide hall ran between pairs of spacious rooms up the noble stairway to the first floor with its sextette of

high-studded bedrooms, up another flight to rooms more numerous but smaller and lower.

O'Reilly stopped everywhere to comment on the fine proportions of rooms and halls, the beauty of the old furniture that filled them. The lower floor was crammed with what had been removed from the ell to make way for Mrs. Drake's jig-sawed treasures, a confusion of old mahogany, old walnut, old maple. The upstairs rooms were furnished as they had always been; but everything was scratched, faded dull, tattered. Southward hesitated at the foot of the garret stairs. And then, as though following a second impulse, she led the way upward.

The garret had much the same effect on O'Reilly that it had had on Dwight. He stood for a few minutes looking about, emitting comments humorously enthusiastic. They did not stay there long however, only time for him to smoke the cigarette that Southward offered. She sat in one of the straight-backed old chairs and her guest made himself comfortable on the *chaise-longue*. Some strange metamorphosis had worked itself in O'Reilly during their excursion through the silent house. The debonnair Irishman had disappeared. A deep glow had taken the place of the twinkle in his eyes. All the olive values in his colouring had become pronounced. He looked at Southward through half-shut lids. His teeth gnawed constantly at his jetty moustache. He was all Spaniard.

Their conversation, alone here, tended inevitably to become more personal, and O'Reilly was obviously trying by hint, suggestion, innuendo, and indirect question to deepen that personal quality. Southward as obviously evaded committing herself to a closer intimacy. She laughed a great deal, but she ignored the hints, eluded the suggestions, evaded the innuendos, answered the questions with generalities. Constantly she parried, and occasionally she thrust. Yet suddenly again and again, in the midst of this fencing, they came together on a little neutral area of congeniality; stood there a moment disarmed. Insensibly they drifted towards that closer understanding which, half perhaps in the spirit of coquetry, Southward seemed determined to avoid. When she suggested that they return to the lower floor, O'Reilly protested that he was much more comfortable—and happy—where he was. Southward's reply was to take up the lamp.

It was not O'Reilly's only call. He came again and again. Sometimes getting home from a walk with Dwight, Southward would find him with her grandfather engaged in an interested exchange of foreign data; or in her grandmother's room answering

innumerable questions fluently and in detail. In the course of time, Cameron, Smith, and Fearing came often enough to Long Lanes to justify Mr. Drake's prophecy that they would soon be "underfoot" there. O'Reilly remained the favourite however, with all except Charlotte. In her case, Smith and Fearing made persistent though unobtrusive effort to become acquainted. She never fully responded to their overtures, but it began to look as though any time she might.

Shayneford, which had stood with unbroken composure the shocks of two centuries of existence, presented its characteristic quiet to the invasion of the New York people. A tide of gossip arose of course and that tide swelled into big waves of conjecture and broke into many minor currents of opinion; but this was all subterranean. Superficially the village had no appearance of noting the arrival of the strangers. For a few days, it achieved the miracle of not seeming to know that they were there. But in private it dissected the invaders microscopically; in the case of the women, their looks, their gowns, their manners; in that of the men, their occupation, their habits, their talk. Shayneford would have been astonished to hear that it was being subjected to analysis, equally ruthless and equally searching. "Typically bourgeois," "a perfect case of economic determinism," "sociologically a non-union shop" were phrases that would sorely have puzzled the little Cape Cod town. However, with no appearance of trying to do so, the aliens soon dominated the place.

Mrs. Boardman, alone of them all, made a determined effort to get into the village life. She went to church and prayer-meeting regularly. The first week, she attended a village "sociable" and a village concert. She talked to everybody. She had the gift of getting acquainted quickly. The fruit of her efforts soon showed itself. She was invited to join the Whist Club; its members entertained her in their homes. She visited other houses; made excursions far afield; had recourse finally to an automobile. After a week, Sim Turner, the village carpenter, began to receive loads of heterogeneous garret-loot. He crated it all and sent it to Mrs. Boardman's New York address.

Just as Mrs. Boardman tried to get into Shayneford life, Miss Hale tried to avoid it. Except for a growing intimacy with Hester, she cultivated seclusion. She was far from an active person. Dancing, she really loved; swimming, she mildly enjoyed; golf, she managed to endure; tennis, she definitely disliked; walking, she never did if she could help it. She came again and again

to the Crowell place, though always in an automobile. But once there, she seemed to make a point of playing the piano for Mrs. Crowell. Twice a week, she hired a motor and she and Hester went for all-day drives through the soft Cape Cod country-side. At first Hester used to point out houses of historic interest; but it soon appeared that Miss Hale's interest in them was tepid unless they happened to be beautiful. Only one thing unfailingly aroused enthusiasm—an antique-shop. They spent hours poking about in the miscellaneous loot of the country dealer. They rarely returned without a purchase of some sort—a bit of old glass, china, or silver, in rare cases a piece of old furniture.

Miss Hale had reached the point in the collection of old things when she was merely matching up sets.

MRS. MORROW on the other hand seemed to absorb Shayneford through her pores. In a week, she knew more about the town than all the other members of her party put together. In a week, too, her daring clothes, her enigmatic complexion (no two agreed as to what was art and how much nature), her eternal cigarette, her extraordinary dancing, her shocking and fascinating frankness were the focus of gossip for all Shayneford. She was as active as she was restless, as reckless as she was active, and as original as she was all three. She turned her enchantments loose with an equal prodigality on Mrs. Wallis and Mrs. Crowell, the Reverend Nehemiah Dodge and Matthew Hallowell. Opinions in regard to her were mixed among the women; the men of course responded whole-heartedly and at once to her seductive quality. She was often seen riding with Dwight Cameron in a motor foray on neighbouring towns, and sometimes she appeared beside Lysander in his rig. The second week she established at the camp a series of informal dances which, because of their novelty and charm, became the most popular entertaining in town. Disdaining the little rough wooden dance platform there, she got the men first to mow the grass to a velvet smoothness, then to cover it with canvas. She sent to New York for a varied and high-coloured assortment of Chinese lanterns; and to Boston for marvellous ices and no less marvellous cakes. She invited everybody in Shayneford and everybody came—even Hallowell. Very early she announced that the campers would give a costume-party before they left and already the town had begun to discuss what it should wear.

The men took a no less intimate part in Shayneford life. They called on the Shayneford girls; danced with them, swam with them; played golf, tennis, and even croquet with them. But—and this seemed strange to Shayneford youth—they seemed almost equally interested in middle age and even old age. They called on the elderly women; or at parties talked to them with apparently as much interest as they showed in the village belles. And the rumour got about that often, returning from a late festivity, they stopped at the house of the village-crank Matthew

Hallowell, that the discussions held there lasted long after midnight. Shayneford would have been astounded to hear also that, though Southward and Hester were silent enough on these occasions, Mrs. Morrow and Miss Hale entered the discussion on equal argumentative terms with the men—and with almost an equal equipment. During the Russian revolution, Hallowell had made a speech in Cooper Union which Fearing still remembered. They talked much of Russia. They talked of labour conditions in America. There was occasional allusion to *The Rebellions of the Nineteenth Century*. Hallowell was frank and crisp with the men, punctiliously courteous with the women. He gave Mrs. Boardman and Miss Hale much advice as to outlying mines of antique treasure. He responded, with a gallantry which had an old-time flavour to Mrs. Morrow's flirtatious charges. But back of the amused twinkle in his frosty blue eyes, he seemed to study the whole crowd as closely as they studied Shayneford.

Towards the end of the third week, he suggested to Southward and Hester that they use his house for return hospitality to the New York people. He recalled to them that he had always given a party for them once during the summer when they were children; he would like to do it again. The two girls accepted his offer; and succeeded in entertaining almost as prettily as Mrs. Morrow.

Hester's friendship with John Smith had been very little interrupted by the arrival of the rest of his party. He occasionally accompanied Miss Hale on the antique-hunting excursions of which Hester was also a member. But though he rarely came to call alone, he was very likely to invite Hester for a stroll if they met by accident on the street.

On one such occasion, they emerged from the Post Office into the drowsy warmth of a perfect August afternoon.

"Let's walk somewhere," Smith suggested suddenly. "I've an hour or two that I'd love to waste on the bosky dingle. Are you free?"

"Yes—oh, yes," Hester answered. "I'm always free. I should like very much to walk. There's a pretty little lane between the upper and lower road that perhaps you've never seen."

"Lead me to it," Smith ordered.

It was a pretty road, though deeply rutted and narrow. It wound between forests of the stumpy, stunted scrub pines which give so picturesque an accent to the Cape Cod scenery. Low as they were, they were high enough to darken the narrow way. On each side stretched shadow-hung areas, carpeted by number-

less harvests of rusted pine-needles and roofed by pine boughs so thickly interwoven that only a rainbow glint here and there showed the play of the sun on their green spires. The road was deserted; the air still; the warm atmosphere drowsily sweet-smelling.

"How wooing this all is," Smith commented. "It is curious how certain aspects of nature induce a kind of melancholy, a gentle melancholy, a melancholy that soothes rather than hurts. It's like the Campagna about Rome. You're always a little sad there—why, you don't know—but it's such a charming sadness that you come back again and again to it." He interrupted himself abruptly, "What shall we talk about, Hester?"

"Tell me about your life," Hester demanded frankly. "I don't know anything about you, you know."

He told her. But he prefaced the narrative with the remark that there was very little to tell and seemed to prove it. His father and mother had died when he was a baby. His guardian, a woman, had given him rather a curious education. She had put him in the hands of a succession of tutors. Two years, when he was sixteen and seventeen, he had spent abroad. On his return, he had gone into newspaper work in New York, had been associated first with this paper and then with that until he had decided to join the staff of *Tomorrow*. He concluded the rather featureless narrative with another abrupt, "Now what shall we talk about?"

"I'd like you to explain a lot of things to me," Hester answered with an unexpected promptness. "You see, most of the time that I am listening to discussion between the men of your party, I am quite in the dark in regard to what you're saying. Of course I know very little about the social movements to which you constantly refer, but aside from that, I don't even understand the terms you use."

"For instance?" Smith queried.

"Well, although I know what you mean when you say A. F. of L. or I. W. W., I don't understand what you mean when you talk about 'labour'—as though it were apart from the rest of the human race. And although I understand—for Matt has explained that to me—the difference between a socialist and an anarchist—I don't at all understand your various attitudes towards them. For instance! They call you 'the I. W. W.' Dwight jokes about it. Edith shudders when she hears the words. She told me you took her to an I. W. W. meeting once and it was like looking at a hall full of mattoids. I can understand that for everybody in Shayneford hates I. W. W.'s. You call Mr. Fearing 'the Re-

former' and you joke him about it as though it were rather a contemptible thing. And I don't understand that. I have always thought a reformer a noble person. I don't understand the relations in society of all these classes to each other—labour—anarchists, socialists, reformers. Do you think you could make it clear to me? Please use words of one syllable as you would to a child."

John laughed. "I'll try. It's simple enough. But before I begin my little spiel, let me put you right on one point. I mean in regard to reform. I don't particularly care for reform—piffling reform—reform that isn't basic, I mean. And I do joke Rip about being a reformer. But I've nothing but admiration for Rip himself and for the work he's doing. As for the rest of it, let me see."

He fixed an absent gaze on the pine-needles above his head. The strident acid hum of some tree-insect filled a long pause.

"Imagine, Hester," he said finally, "this world in which we live to be a huge dirty old toppling house; a house so old that the walls keep splitting into great rents and the roof keeps cracking into great holes. The glass in the windows has long ago fallen out. There are two stories to this house and they are filled with people. The upper story is an enormous airy hall. In that hall live all those who possess more money than they can ever possibly earn, more money than they know what to do with—the capitalist class, in short. They have managed by means of their wealth to conceal all the decay and destruction that is going on in their part of the foul old house. They have covered the filthy walls with pictures and statues. They have concealed the holes in the windows with draperies and tapestries. They have covered the rents in the ceiling with a highly decorated roof. And in the midst of all this—of decay covered with beauty—they talk and laugh and dine and wine and dance and entertain each other in a thousand fantastic and extravagant ways. Now, just below this great hall is another hall of exactly the same size but cut up into a multitude of small rooms. That story holds the great middle class. This middle class spends all its time in mending the house, patching the ceiling so that it will not drop down on them, reinforcing the walls so that they will not fall in on them, keeping the frame together, in short, only by eternal and indefatigable efforts. Below this great floor with its many cut-up rooms is the cellar. And in the cellar, in dark and muck, live the labouring class. But for them, the house would not stand at all; for they hold the whole structure on their

shoulders. They lie in the mud on their hands and knees, their very foreheads pressed into the slime. Above them, the middle class in a kind of unctuous complacency go on mending walls and pillars, never once glancing down to see what is the foundation of their building. And above the middle class the capitalist class go on tinkering with beauty, trying to cover up horror, regardless of the two classes over whose heads they dance and dine. I have never been able to make up my mind which of those two upper floors is the most horrible. At the top they are reckless and ruthless at worst; care-free and thoughtless at best. On the middle floor, they are smug and self-satisfied. They demand nothing of those who are above; they give nothing to those who are below. But that cellar, Hester, is a terrible place."

John's eyes came from the pine-needles, fixed themselves on Hester's face. But it was apparent they did not see her. They looked straight through her to their vision.

"The people in that cellar live and die in darkness and starvation and suffocation and disease. They never see the light. They cannot move. It looks superficially jet-black there. However, it is not really as black as it seems; there is a little light. For everywhere, weaving in and out among them, go men, bearing tiny lamps. These men whisper rebellion into the ears of the people who hold the pillars of the house on their backs. Some of the men call themselves reformers. Some of them call themselves socialists. Some of them call themselves anarchists. And their messages vary. But, although they are all suggesting different ways of doing it, and some of them perhaps not as strongly as others, they are all urging these bound men to do the same thing. And that is to rise up in their might, throw the pillars of the tottering old house off their shoulders and let it crash to the ground. Some day, Hester, they will do that. And you will see a race of creatures, swart, deformed, half-blinded, emerging into the sunlight of the great outside world. 'Working men of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains.' I would rather have written those words than all Shakespeare."

"I think I begin to understand," Hester said after a long pause. "And of course you're with——" She did not finish her sentence but when John completed it for her with the single word, quietly spoken, "labour," she said it with him. The silence closed in on them but it was palpably one of those pregnant silences when two people pursue the same line of thought; a silence in which

everything that goes on in one mind is perfectly clear to the other.

"But you read," Hester offered tremulously after a while, "of violence—conspiracies—assassinations—dynamite. Do you justify that?"

"Not for myself," John answered directly, "because I haven't experienced the terrific living conditions which bring those results. In the long history of labour, those things have occasionally happened—and often because men were crazed. They will happen again inevitably just so long as the conditions which produce madness in men's souls continue to exist. I don't excuse or justify it. I only say this, Hester. If those men in the black cellar conspire to violence I'm with them. If they commit dynamite outrages, I'm with them. If they assassinate, I'm with them. And the more they conspire and assassinate and commit dynamite outrages——" John paused. His voice had turned stern, had run to a crescendo of bitterness; it rang now as though his words were stones dropped into a pit of iron,—“the more I'm with them.” He concluded quietly.

Again encompassing silence. Hester sighed. "Ah," she exclaimed bitterly. "The world has always been like this and I've never suspected it."

CHAPTER XII

SOUTHWARD was dancing with Lysander. As partners, they were well matched; they moved with an effect of perfect adjustment as of people who have danced much together. They danced until the music ceased; continued until it started again; kept on through two brief encores.

"Let's go outside, Ly," Southward said, when the music stopped for the last time. "And steal a fan from somewhere. I'm bursting with the heat."

Picking a fan from one of the seats, Lysander led the way outdoors to a deserted end of the piazza. Vines made dense shadow there. Southward parted the leaves and ensconced herself on the rail. "This air feels good!" she commented. Lysander, fanning her vigorously, stood beside her. For a moment, he did not speak. He gazed down into her moon-lit face.

"Southward, are you going to marry that man, Cameron?" he demanded abruptly. "Of course I realise you've been seeing a lot of him. I know all about the swimming nights in Long Pond. I wondered."

Southward had been looking absently off on gleam and gloom. At this she jumped and turned. "Lord no, Ly. Mercy no. He hasn't asked me in the first place. It isn't that sort of thing. And in the second place, I'm not going to marry anybody. You must have heard me say that a hundred times."

"Oh, well, all girls say they aren't going to marry," Lysander commented. "It seems to be a part of their game. A fellow hears that all the time but he soon learns not to put any stock in it."

"Well, of all—Lysander, do you mean to tell me you don't believe it when I say it?"

Southward's incredulity held a note of offended pride.

Lysander started to speak, hesitated, reflected an instant; then started again. "I do and I don't," he admitted in a puzzled tone. "Of course you're different from the other girls in Shayneford. I know that well enough. Sometimes, I think it's not because you're less of a woman but because you're more of one. But if that's true, you don't know it and I can't prove it. I think you'll marry sometime. But it'll have to be some fellow that's strong

enough to beat your game. I can't beat it, but of course that doesn't mean that there aren't men who can." He paused. When he spoke though, his voice had not lifted above or sagged below its cool level. "Just the same, Southward, I want you to understand this—you're the first woman I ever really wanted that I couldn't get."

"I believe that easily enough," Southward said. "You're all right, Lysander. I don't know why I'm not in love with you," she went on in a meditative tone, "for I certainly am strong for you. It's because I can't fall in love—really fall in love with anybody, I guess. I like you better than any other man in Shayneford. For one reason you play fair." She glanced off for a moment from the main line of her argument as one who is talking to fill in time. "I try to play fair with men. Sometimes, I guess, I don't succeed. But you don't know how many of *them* haven't played fair. Not that I cared. I just noticed it."

"Yes," Lysander went on, almost as though he had not heard these remarks, as though straight through them he had followed his own train of thought, "you'll get yours sometime, Southward. It's just come to me. I thought you were immune but you aren't. You'll get it and you'll get it hard. And I bet I'd be just damn fool enough to be sorry for you."

"Of course you would, Ly." Southward leaned forward to pat his shoulder affectionately. But the next moment, she had stretched upwards in a yawn. With her arms still raised above her head, she asked, "Do you think I'm pretty, Lysander? I don't mean according to Shayneford standards: I mean according to city standards. You're one of the few who'll tell me the truth." She yawned again. "I mean for instance how do I compare with Mrs. Morrow?"

"Are you jealous of her?" Lysander thrust suddenly. And then with a return to the equability with which he had conducted his half of the conversation, "She's more than half stuck on Cameron and he's more than a quarter stuck on her. I guess likely that was on the road to being a crush when you bust it up."

"No, I'm not jealous of Mrs. Morrow, Ly," Southward said, the blue-and-black shimmer of her eyes fronting the moonlight. "I just mentioned her because she was the only good-looking city-woman I could think of. I might have just as well said Miss Hale—only——"

"Oh, well, you know Miss Hale isn't in your class for a moment. Mrs. Morrow is. And the best dancer I ever saw. She beats the girls out on the Barbary Coast. And then besides—

well, she's high-flyer all right. But of course you qualify from any point of view. Not that I haven't seen plenty of pretty women too, through the West and in California in particular. But there's something about you—maybe it's your damned indifference—you certainly do things to a man. It brings out the very deuce in me."

Southward's eyes absently followed the moon in its dipping flight through a flock of clouds. "It's queer," she said and there was a shade of sympathy in her voice. She dropped that sentence and began another, "I mean——"

"Yes," Lysander's interrupting voice lowered until it became husky, "if a man gets you into his system once, he's going to have a devil of a time getting you out."

"But I mean particularly city-women," Southward began. It was as though she were not hearing Lysander at all.

"What are you asking me all this for?" A furious perplexity that threatened to become anger came into Lysander's voice.

"Oh, I don't know," Southward said. "Idle curiosity, I guess." She seemed to prove her words by yawning indifferently. She arose and again stretched.

Lysander jumped to his feet. His arm shot out. He seized her as in an iron clamp, pulled her over to him. Before she could stir, he kissed her. Then his grasp loosened.

Southward did not struggle. With a single expert movement, she freed herself from his loose clutch. But her preoccupation had vanished; her eyes were flint. "Lysander," she said, "don't." She added, "Please." But her *please* was a command. "I don't expect you to slop over like that."

Lysander folded his arms over his chest. By a process of physical pressure, he seemed suddenly to inhibit a huge rushing tide of emotion. He seated himself. "I don't expect to slop over myself, Southward. Excuse me this time. I promise you it will never happen again."

"That's all right, Ly," Southward said comfortingly. "I understand. But be *sure* it doesn't happen again. I like you, but this sort of thing actually makes me sick. I'm not mushy, you know." She did not sit down however. "There, the music's started up." She added after a silence, "Let's go back."

The Library in which all the Shayneford dances were held had been made over from an old farm house of the primitive colonial type. The original living-room, into which adjacent bedrooms had been thrown, now served as the dance-hall. Low-ceilinged,

wide-raftered, it still retained the broad smooth floor-boards, the noble spacious red-brick fireplace with the old oven at one side and little cupboards above. The four city-men had done very well with their decorations. Boughs outlined a tracery of green against the palely-papered walls and vines festooned themselves between. No flowers had been employed; yet, here and there flashed colour; autumn stealing on ahead of her appointed time had touched the maple leaves with her flaming fingers. Files of little fir-trees, enclosing a chair or two, made tête-à-tête retreats. In one of these sat Hester and Ripley Fearing.

"Everybody's going out now," Fearing said. "Let's stay here. It will be quieter." Then, "What a picture!"

"Yes," Hester agreed. "Don't they look picturesque?"

A jam of colour and sparkle had caught in the doorway. The costumes followed the grotesque ideal which prevails at most rustic affairs of the sort. In the main, the men dressed in accordance with the comic supplement version of the farmer; hats exaggeratedly large and ragged, overalls too tight and short; woollen socks too thick; ties too spectacular. Farmers, darkies, clowns marked the limit for imagination of rustic masculinity. Lysander wore a complete cowboy outfit—even to chaps. With the exception of the city-men, who came as pirates, he was the most picturesque male figure in the room. The girls showed almost as little imagination, but the results were more pleasing. If as gipsies, flower girls, and Indian maidens, they ran to an over-conventional display of unbound hair and slender ankles, at least they brought colour and grace into the scheme. With this bromidic picturesqueness, Miss Hale a Greek vestal, Hester a Fra Angelico angel, Mrs. Morrow an Arabian houri, and Southward as Robin Hood made sulphuric contrast.

No answer came from Fearing. Hester looked up at him. He was not watching the dancers. He was studying the mothers who sat on settees backed up to the wall. "I was thinking of them," he said.

Hester's eye ran down the line; Mrs. Wallis, hard, bright-eyed, with tiny sharp features, the half-grown, spectacled Esther at her side, furtively following Pearl's every move; Mrs. Tubman fatly complacent over King Curtis's devotion to Flora; Mrs. Peters surveying over her nose every tête-à-tête group, the tail of her eye always on Pinkie; Mrs. Dodge, always watching her two grown girls, fat, stumpy Ella at her right; Sue-Salome enjoying the affair with the bright-eyed activity of a child and snapping from time to time her brisk comments down the line; Libbie at

her left, earrings in a perpetual twinkle as she matched her sister's remarks with phrases quite as pungent; and so on and on, grandmothers and mothers and aunts, and all with an eye, wistful or appraising, proud or jealous, glued to the panorama of youth. "I am thinking of a talk I had yesterday with Hallowell," Fearing went on, "on my pet hobby 'human waste.' Hallowell's observations on the subject of women were very illuminating."

"Yes, he's always telling Southward and me that we're waste women," Hester said.

"And you are!" Fearing agreed promptly. He brought his teeth together with a ferocious snap. But his face beamed with kindness; his dull eyes with sympathy. "I have now at this minute—I always have had—a feeling of nausea when I look at a group of average middle-aged women. They seem so useless and ended, so fat and fatuous. Take that line over there for instance! They've brought a family of children into the world and raised them. The world considers that they've done their job and they think so too. And now with from twenty to thirty years of good work still in them, they're just sitting in the gallery, watching the march of the coming generation, waiting for their grandchildren to appear in order to begin the same job over again. They live most of the last part of their life plastered to a peephole. Lord!"

Hester's brow furrowed. "I never thought of it in that light." She shivered. "But that—or worse—is what lies before most of us. It lies before me."

"It lies before you if you deliberately walk into it," Fearing warned. "But don't let life grind you like that, Hester. If I have any advice to give—which to my credit I will say commonly I haven't—it is just that. Don't let life beat you. It will beat you if it can. It won't make you, unless you yourself make it make you."

Hester's lids drooped. "It's beating me already," she admitted, "and I can't help it."

"You've got to help it," Fearing persisted. "You must and you must do it alone. Nobody can help you in this. It's the challenge fate has thrown to you. Remember that; it's your job." His voice was almost stern now, but his melancholy hound's eyes were as kind as ever.

Hester sighed a long deep sigh.

"Shall we dance or walk or just sit this out, Edith?" John Smith said to Edith Hale.

"Let's sit it out," Edith answered languidly. "I feel tired. But on the piazza, please."

"All right." Smith picked up the shawl of embroidered crêpe which she dropped as she arose and followed her slow step.

"I think you'd better put this on," he said as she seated herself. He held the shawl for her, but with the instinctive consciousness of her appearance that never left her, Edith proceeded to arrange and rearrange it after he had placed it on her shoulders.

"That's charming," John applauded her efforts. And, indeed, she had manipulated the thickly-embroidered, fringed, silky square until it had become an integral part of her white Greek costume with its flowing draperies and the three bands which held the classic knot of her hair. "You are wonderful to-night, Edith. And you look well. You look better every day."

"John," Edith Hale asked directly, ignoring the compliment, "are you falling in love with Hester Crowell?"

John laughed. But he sobered immediately. "No, Edith," he said, "I assure you I'm not falling in love with anybody—and certainly not with Hester Crowell. You of all women ought to realise that."

"Yes. I know what you're going to say," Edith interrupted with a weary accent. "So please don't say it. But it has occurred to me—it looked—John, I believe that people can be in love without knowing it. And I think that's what's happened to you."

"I don't think I could be in love without knowing it, any more than you," John said. "We're both too analytic for that, too conscious of our sensations, too modern in short. No, Edith, I'm not in love with anybody openly or secretly. And it seems to me you ought to know that; for, if I were, you'd be the first to hear it."

"I beg your pardon," Edith said humbly after a pause in which she considered this explanation.

"You like Hester?" John questioned after a pause, in which he ignored this apology. "You've said so from the beginning. But you really do, don't you?"

"I love her," Edith answered simply.

"She's a fine creature," John commented. "But almost broken on the wheel of life. She's one of those grim, implacable, relentless—but colourless—tragedies that only New England seems able to produce."

Edith shuddered. "When you think of it all—that terrible mother—and the two deaths—her sister and the little girl—and all

her years stretching before her teaching—teaching—teaching—oh, well we must break it up. I'm going to get her on to New York next year by hook or crook."

"That's the thing to do," John assented quietly. "Change, complete change, a lot of excitement—and to show her how the world is waking up, how differently it is thinking and acting about many things, how unnecessary all her self-sacrifice is. Yes, you ought to do that, Edith."

"Dwight," Azile Morrow said, "how are you getting on with that new novel? Or are you doing anything with it?"

They were dancing. Cameron was looking down into Azile's eyes with the amusement that always came into them in her presence. He kept breaking into all kinds of Terpsichorean improvisations to which his partner, floating as a gossamer, swaying as a reed, responded with every line of her liquid body.

"No, I haven't written a word for days. Why should I, Azile? This is my vacation. Can't I have a good time once in a while? Especially if I work like the dickens when I get back to New York. I promise to be good then."

"You promise."

"Oh, sure I've got to. Wendell and Daly are yelling for a novel. I sent them an outline of this the other day and I got an enthusiastic letter from them yesterday. Oh, I want to write it, and I will—sure as shooting."

"I'm going to have a writing-room fixed up for you at our place," Azile declared, "so that you can hide from people. I'm determined that you shall get that book finished this winter. Don't you think that will be a good idea?"

"Great!" Cameron replied. But his tone had no enthusiasm; it was even a little absent. "I don't know how much I'll be in New York though."

"Why, where are you going?" Azile demanded. "This is something new, isn't it?"

"Oh, no," Dwight exclaimed. "I've been thinking of going away for quite a while. I haven't any special plan. I don't know that the Great White Way is just the spot for me. Old John says that it isn't. And this return to nature has done me so much good that I've even thought of joining the governor in New Hampshire, shutting myself up and going to it."

"Rot!" Azile protested vigorously. "You'd die in a little country hole in the winter-time. No art-atmosphere, no shop-talk, no stimulation, no, what you yourself call 'the spirit of

place.' If you want to get away, why don't you go abroad with mother and me? That will give you change, experience, leisure and a new kind of local colour."

"Well, you see—that's quite a different proposition—I mean——" Dwight with the air of a man who hasn't his argument ready perceptibly floundered. "I don't exactly want to get out of the country. I might at any time have to go back to the newspaper game—oh, well, of course I'm just talking now. Nothing's settled. I have no plans really. I don't know what I'm going to do."

The music started after another interval. Cameron caught Southward as she came into the room with Lysander. He and Lysander exchanged a civil word or two; then Cameron whirled her away.

They had undoubtedly danced many times together since that day of the tea at the camp. They were not so graceful as Morena and Mrs. Morrow who were now floating about the room in a welded composition; but they were more striking, even though they were more athletic. They danced with the arrogance which was equally typical of them, as though they had the room to themselves. They swooped like a pair of hawks pursuing prey from one end to the other and then, like a pair of sea-gulls whose outstretched wings rest on the water, drifted back. The other dancers gave way, following them covertly with their eyes.

"Jiminy, that was fun!" Cameron exclaimed, mopping his face after the second encore. "But let's get out quick before I melt and flow through the cracks into the cellar. What do you say to going for a little walk where we can talk quietly?"

"All right," Southward agreed demurely. Her eyes glimmered.

They struck off into the tiny path which led from the piazza to the pond. A clearing between the bushes at its end showed a glimpse of water burnished under the moon. Southward, in her Robin Hood costume of green and brown, seated herself on a flat rock in the grass, clasped her hands about her knees, the curled-up toes of her shoes close together. Dwight placed himself a little below so that he looked up into her face. The moon was still brilliant; the glimmer had not left her eyes.

"What are you laughing at?" Dwight demanded.

"I was thinking of the uncounted hordes who have begged me during an intermission to come where we could 'talk quietly.' Why do they always assume that I want to 'talk quietly'? I never wanted to 'talk quietly' in my life."

"They don't," Dwight explained. "They want to do the talking."

"It is true," Southward remarked pensively, "that I have been proposed to twice on this very rock."

"Well, damn you," Cameron protested cheerfully. "That statement puts a fierce crimp in the soft nothings I was going to whisper in your shell-like ear. But how can I wax sentimental with the ghosts of millions of rejected lovers standing about?"

"The answer to that is not to wax sentimental at all," Southward advised promptly, "unless you want to bore me."

"I don't want to do that of course," Dwight replied. "But I will tell you parenthetically—now brace yourself for a shock—that you are too pretty for any use."

"You needn't bother to tell me," Southward ordered impudently. "I know that already. Go on!"

"And that you make a delicious boy."

"I know that too," Southward asserted, again impudently. "Haven't you anything better or newer?"

"And that—I'm certainly talking under difficulties and making no headway whatever—I never felt so much like losing my head for a moment."

"Go on," Southward urged, still impudently. "Lose it! You can lose your head and your heart with perfect impunity. For if I find them, I'll give them back to you instanter—especially the heart."

"It's great to hear you say that," her companion murmured, his eyes sparkling with mirth, "and awfully reassuring to a man who's afraid of matrimony and yet dying to singe his wings a little. It's like wearing a life-preserver when you're swimming in deep water. You can afford to have cramp." He paused and his manner changed. The analytic look came into his eyes. "You really *don't* want to marry, do you?"

"You bet I don't," Southward protested with fervour.

"No more do I. But let's waive that. Oh, by the way, tell me what do you think of the first chapters of the novel?"

"Well," Southward said, "I *liked* them. They interested me. And yet I had a feeling that you hadn't quite got the place. Of course, I know it so well—but then I hate love-stories anyway. I'm no judge of such things. I'm only interested in facts. And I hate love-making everywhere. It bores me in books and makes me tired in plays. Still, of course you held my attention. I could point out to you if you'd like places where the talk seems to be more western than Yankee——"

"I'd like to have you do that," Cameron said. His manner was a little crestfallen. He seemed to wait for Southward to go on; but she added nothing. "Oh, there's another important thing——" he continued. "Aside from calling your attention to the fact that this is our last night here, I want to know if I can come over to the garret after this shindig is over?"

"That will be pretty late, won't it?"

"It's to stop promptly at twelve—they stipulated that. Of course I'll take you home."

"No," Southward interrupted, "Mr. O'Reilly has already offered to do that and I said he could."

"Damn!" Dwight murmured. "I wish Morena'd keep out of this. Well, I'll take some other girl home. John will undoubtedly look after Hester. Say, by the way, do you think that's a case?"

"Not on Hester's side," Southward said with promptness.

"Naturally," Dwight's riposte was as quick as her own, "I'm not discussing that side of it. I mean old John."

"No, I don't think so," Southward decided slowly, "if you ask me, I should say that Mr. Smith was immune to love."

"Well, Rip'll take Azile and Edith home. I'll wait around a while and then come to Long Lanes. Two hoots as usual?"

"All right," Southward permitted lazily.

"The question to be discussed now—and then——" he went on, "is whether you're coming on to New York."

"I can answer now—and then——" Southward said with a sudden determined hardening of her face, "that I am coming. I've made up my mind to do that. I don't see how it's to be managed yet of course, but I shall accomplish it because I've always accomplished anything that I've set myself to do. It may mean that I'll have to start Friday night and return Sunday, but I'll do it."

"I believe you." Cameron's eyes grew more keenly analytic. He looked at Southward as though she were a new object that he had just discovered in the landscape. "I believe you," he repeated. "Say, do I get the New York rights to you?" he asked suddenly.

"Don't understand," objected Southward. She leaned down, plucked a blade of grass, placed it to her lips. The tense silence broke suddenly in an unearthly wail.

"I mean—well, I want to have the first chance to take you about in New York. I want it to be understood that you're my guest in a manner of speaking. That system protects you from the other men."

"But suppose I don't want to be protected from the other men," Southward suggested shrewdly. "Besides, if I want protection from men, the easiest thing I do is to provide it for myself."

"You may find it different in New York. You're too pretty and too original. I mean there'll be a dozen men in our crowd who'll try to monopolise you. Then again, it protects me from the women who are drifting too. You see we're not really bound—it doesn't prevent us from having a good time with other people and yet we can use each other as a shield against them if they get troublesome."

Southward's eyelashes shot downward. The glimmer faded slowly from her eyes; they grew as hard as flints. Then the flint softened; the glimmer came back. She produced before speaking three long deliberate wails from the grass-blade. "Good Business!" she commented. "I'm for it. Now, see if I understand. Ostensibly we're on the verge of getting engaged. That means that you can send out an alarm any time trouble threatens for you or I any time it threatens for me. And yet we can flirt on the side just as much as we want. Is that it?"

Dwight stirred uneasily. It was as though his plan seemed a little more cold-blooded when Southward outlined it. "Yes, that's it," he admitted finally. But apparently it was an admission that he did not entirely enjoy.

Southward considered this, alternately blowing wild maniacal complaints from grass-blades and gazing mutely up at him. But all the time, the glimmer in her eyes grew brighter and brighter until it seemed to splash through her eyelashes.

"All right," she said, "I agree. We've entered into a near engagement." She arose. Cameron jumped to his feet too. They stood close.

Cameron looked straight down into her eyes. "All right," he said. "Let's seal it." He suddenly reached forward and pulled her into his arms. He dropped his head. But before his lips touched hers, Southward wrenched herself away. Her face flushed with anger. She panted. "Don't you ever do such—that—again." Her teeth gritted. "Our agreement doesn't cover—this sort of thing, remember."

CHAPTER XIII

"THIS is our dance, Angel," Smith said to Hester. "Would you in its place prefer to walk the celestial fields with me?"

"I would much prefer that," Hester answered.

"Very well—where shall we go?"

"There's a little path running round the pond that's very pretty," Hester suggested.

"Let's take it," Smith agreed promptly. "I haven't seen it yet. Remember, you're my guide—a heavenly one too," he added, surveying her costume critically. "You see," he said as they emerged into the gloom of the piazza and then to the blanched lawn, "I'm a foxy little man to-night. I picked the dance before the intermission so that we might take a quiet hike. I knew you wouldn't mind missing the ice-cream. It seems to me," he went on as they struck into a little path, open to the pond on one side and heavily bushed on the other, "that you have a pippin of a moon in Shayneford."

"We're very proud of it," Hester said with the shy humour that happiness had begun to develop in her. "We think the Pilgrim Fathers picked out a very good one for us."

"I have been accused," John went on, catching her light note and sustaining it, "of being in love with you. By a man," he added hastily. "I thought I'd consult you about it." He still maintained the light note. "What do you think?"

Hester laughed. "What a ridiculous idea!" She laughed again. "If only somebody would say that to mother though."

Smith laughed too. There was an element of relief in his mirth. "Thank you, Hester," he said gaily. "I don't mind confessing to you that I don't want to fall in love with you."

Hester echoed his gay note. "Don't worry! You won't. People don't as a rule."

"But," Smith went on, "it's my conviction, Hester, that you and I are as good friends as it's possible for man and woman to be."

"I hope so," Hester said fervently. "and I think so—only I never know enough about anything, least of all friendships between men and women, to come to any conclusions."

"You know enough about everything to come to conclusions, Hester," Smith replied. "Hi! what's this?"

"The graveyard," Hester answered.

Just ahead glimmered a tall cylindrical column. Beyond, slate-grey or granite-pink, or marble-white, stretched forests of grave-stones. Parallel iron bars running between square stone posts separated them from the road.

"That's the most extraordinary thing about New England," Smith said. "The graveyards. So many of them everywhere. And often such beautiful places—so old and vine-wreathed and lichened."

"Yes, I know what you mean," Hester said. "All the graveyards here are such friendly places. I never think of them with horror or dread."

Smith turned suddenly and looked at her. Then he looked back at the graveyard-wall, a quizzical smile on his lips. "Stand there!" he commanded, pointing.

The wall was broken at one place by the grassy mound that covered a tomb. Picking up her draperies, Hester obediently mounted the tiny elevation.

"Face me!" Smith continued to command, "now put your trumpet to your lips."

Edith Hale had suggested Hester's costume of a Fra Angelico angel. She had sent to New York for the thin white stuff of which it was made. She had designed it. She had draped it about Hester's thin figure. She had arranged Hester's hair. The draperies were simple and unpremeditated-looking; they floated. Hester's hair was parted in the middle, brought down in a burning smoothness that suggested momentary rebellion far over the ears, exposing a peak of forehead and only the round of the cheeks. At the nape of the neck, it was imprisoned in a cylinder of stiff gold lace; from there, it hung free to the knees and then came into a club-like plait enclosed in another golden cylinder which swung against her heels. On her head was a halo of gilded cardboard and in her hand was a trumpet of gilded cardboard. Fearing had made these properties. Now the shade turned her face to a white triangle, but the moonlight put a faint golden wash on her hair, her halo and the trumpet which her long slim hand held to her lips.

Smith burst into chuckles. "You look like an Easter postcard," he said. "Come back now." He assisted her down the incline.

"How have things been going at home?" he asked as they strolled on.

"Better than ever before," Hester said earnestly. "I'm so grateful for it, too. Mother seems more happy than I have ever seen her. Miss Hale has been a great help. She always plays every time she comes over. She plays as long as mother will listen. And mother loves music so. I can't tell you what a difference it's made."

"You like Edith?" John queried.

"I love her," Hester answered with the same fine simplicity with which Edith had made a similar statement earlier in the evening.

"I knew you would. I felt that you'd become great friends."

"I feel so happy—and so flattered—to think that she—would care—that I had anything to offer——" Hester plunged into those hesitancies which with her always impeded the phrasing of any self-revelation.

"Do you think you'll be able to come to New York this winter?"

"No," Hester said quietly and simply. "Nor any other winter for a long while. But I shan't need to go anywhere this winter. I've had so much this summer. I shall enjoy myself being quiet and remembering it all. Oh, how I shall think and think and think in the long evenings and after I get to bed—living every moment of it over again. Sometimes it seems to me that I've had enough this summer to last me for the rest of my life."

"I've enjoyed it too," Smith was as quiet and simple as she. "More than I could tell—if I attempted to tell—which I shan't. But don't let yourself think you've had enough to last the rest of your life. This is only the beginning. However, I think you'll visit New York sometime. If not this winter, the next. And we shan't forget. I'll send you a letter or a book occasionally to prove it. I'm not involving you in a correspondence," he said hastily. "Please remember that. But I don't want you to think that we're birds-of-passage friends. For when you come to New York, as I'm sure you will—because it's the rule that we manage by hook or crook to do the thing we want to do—when you do come, remember we'll make it as pleasant for you as possible. For what I can't give you—or Dwight or Azile—Edith will hand you on a gold platter."

"Oh, I want to go," Hester breathed, "I do want to go. You will never know how much—even if I attempted to tell you, which I won't." To quote Smith's own words to him in this manner was a decided step forward in badinage for the shy Hester. "Do you think you'll come to Shayneford next summer?"

Smith hesitated. "I hope so. But I don't know. It's pretty

difficult to tell. We're such a restless and wandering gang of beggars. We never have done the same thing twice yet. Perhaps I can get down here for a week-end now and then."

"I see," Hester said. "Shall we go back to the dance?"

"All right. Oh, by the way, may I take you home to-night? I ask you for a particular reason."

"Yes, certainly." She looked at him inquiringly.

He answered the look. "It's only that it's my last night here and I thought I'd dedicate it to you and the moon."

"I think this camp-life has done you good, Edith," Ripley Fearing said to Miss Hale. They had sat out two dances in a quiet end of the piazza.

"Oh, yes," Edith agreed. "No doubt about that. I've acquired enough strength—and enough courage—to go on for a while." She smiled, but her eyes were melancholy.

"If you only acquire a little more, you'll realise that there's a permanent cure. Some day you'll come to me and ask me for my prescription."

I'll ask for it now, Ripley. What is it?"

"To attach yourself to an unpopular reform movement," Fearing answered. He smiled his kind smile but his hound's eyes were quite as melancholy as Edith's.

Edith shook her head. "I couldn't. I'm not that kind of person. I don't like reformers and I don't like reform. Reformers are always such ugly, dull, humourless, one-ideaed people. They always make me blue and unhappy."

"Yes, that's the chief handicap that what we call—reform—labours under," Fearing agreed, "the reformers themselves. You see, in order to be able to stand up to the gruelling that the game means, they have to be filled with their idea to the exclusion of anything else. Everything must go down before that idea, enjoyment, human interests, sense of humour, appreciation of beauty. It takes a very big person indeed to retain any of these in a reform work. Being a reformer means always approaching people on the one side on which all their defences are up—abstract justice. Fighting prejudice, instinctive selfishness, and intrenched power is not easy."

"My friend," Edith Hale said tremulously, "you make me ashamed. And yet, I'm not making a small, petty, superficial criticism. It's the result of some practical experience and a good deal of observation. Take reform itself. I have lived, in the West, in one or two cities in which reform waves have struck

and struck hard. And do you know the effect has been to uglify and dull and deaden the whole city. It isn't because I'm trying to be 'liberal' or 'bohemian' or any of those things that we all hate—as poses—I'm describing to you a state of mind that exists and that I can't argue away. What they call a 'wide-open' town is so much more lovable and gay and human than the reformed town. When people who don't want to dance or drink or sit up late try to enjoin other people from doing these things, the effect is ugly. I don't want to live in a reform town. Now why is it?"

"I think," Ripley answered, "that your quarrel is with the wrong kind of reform. I'm not for any of those movements which seek to circumscribe personal liberty. And yet I suppose I don't believe in complete personal liberty. There's a line somewhere I think—I've never been able to fix it and perhaps I'm wrong—where personal liberty stops. And that's the trouble with most people—they don't realise that yet. I mean for instance what I drink is my business, when I drink and how much I drink is also my business, provided I don't interfere with the personal liberty of everybody else. And yet even that idea can be carried to excess. Take dope——"

"You mean you think the state ought to step in there," Edith questioned as though incredulous.

"Yes—decidedly."

"I don't," Edith said, her weary air touched with an inflexibility surprising in her gentleness. "I don't think it ought to step in *anywhere*."

"However," Ripley went on, "I don't I suppose believe in the wrong kind of reform any more than you do. I hate the word. It's the biggest cross I bear that I find myself constantly referred to as a reformer. If in my college days I had guessed I would ever come to this—— But the right kind of—well, call it reform as long as there's no other name. I prefer calling it inevitable change—that's a great fight. Once you're in it, the other things, minor personal troubles, all slip away and fall into their proper perspective and their right proportions. I think you'll come to me sometime and ask me to give you something to do."

"I don't think I will," Edith said. "For there are my other limitations. Theoretically I hate injustice and practically I weep over the individual case. But I'm too fastidious. I've developed that fastidiousness to a point where it owns me and dominates me. It makes all the difference in the world to me what kind of people are about, even what kind of *things*. People and things make my atmosphere really, not thoughts and ideas."

Fearing did not answer. He only shook his head.

"No, I think I shall never turn to you now," Edith concluded. "It's all settled for me. It's all been settled for a long time."

"Where'd you get that costume, Mr. Manning?" Azile Morrow inquired. She sat, facing Lysander, who balanced himself on the rail, his back against one of the posts.

"In the West," Lysander answered. "Oh, by the way I forgot to ask you—do you mind my smoking?"

"No. And may I? Would anybody see me here?"

Lysander, still balancing himself expertly, craned backwards. "Sure! Nobody'd see you. Have one?" He pulled himself upright, moved over to her settee, slapping his pockets until he struck pasteboard. Mrs. Morrow selected a cigarette from the little box he held out to her. He fumbled in his pocket again. But with the cigarette between her lips, she held her face up. He bent down and she lighted her cigarette at his. He did not return to the rail; instead he seated himself at her side. "And I don't shock you by wanting to smoke?" she asked.

"No—I've seen women smoke before. I've been away from here in the West."

"Oh, you've lived in the West," Mrs. Morrow said in a surprised tone. "That explains it." Lysander did not ask her what it explained and she went on, "What part of the West?"

"Colorado, Wyoming, California."

"What brought you back here?"

"Oh—I don't know—habit or homesickness."

"It was a girl." Mrs. Morrow turned and looked straight up into his eyes.

"You're wrong," Lysander informed her. And without turning he looked straight down into her eyes.

"Oh, piffle!" Mrs. Morrow exclaimed. "It's always a girl." She puffed an airy cloud into his face.

Lysander continued to examine her critically through the grey smoke-film. His arm dropped back lightly along the edge of the settee. But this time he did not contradict her.

"It's awfully becoming to you," she went on, still gazing frankly up into his eyes. "That get-up." Then again frankly coquettish, "How do you like mine?"

Lysander surveyed her at length and at leisure. She was veiled and trousered in a harem-costume of liberty-silk in which several shades of yellow melted into several more of orange. She wore many sliding bracelets of gold. A large uncut topaz suspended

from a chain fell on her forehead. She had blackened her long eyelashes and carmined her lips, but otherwise she was not made up. The soft gauzes seemed to minimise her underlying muscularity, to exaggerate an indefinable but definite suggestion of voluptuousness.

"Frankly," Lysander said coolly, "I don't like it."

Mrs. Morrow smiled enchantingly. "Of course you wouldn't—you lovely, average, normal country lad. I'm glad you don't. You'd like me to go as a flower-girl or a milkmaid or Night or Morning, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, no. That isn't what you asked me. You asked me if I liked it. I don't. But, you are much more exciting this way."

His impudent point apparently penetrated. She smiled even more dazzlingly. She had continued from the instant he seated himself beside her to puff her cigarette directly into his face. His cigarette had gone out. "Why don't you come to New York?" she suggested.

"I hate cities," Lysander answered. "I guess I was built for the country."

"I guess you were," Azile Morrow agreed. She narrowed her baleful eyes and stared at him intently. "Heavens, what a complexion! And what clear eyes! What milky teeth! And such curls! Aren't girls always running their hands through those curls?"

"Yes," Lysander answered, still terse.

Mrs. Morrow laughed. "I love your impudence." Her shapely big white hand flew like a bird upwards. It rested with a faint flutter on Lysander's crisply-roached golden crest, came down softly across his cheek, dropped to her lap.

Lysander fumbled again for a match, but unsuccessfully. Smiling, Mrs. Morrow watched him, her chin up, her lids more than half over her baleful eyes. "There's a light here—you know—if you're so desperate," she said, talking with the cigarette between her lips.

But Lysander did not after all light his cigarette. One hand removed it from his lips. The other fell off the settee to Mrs. Morrow's waist, tightened there. Mrs. Morrow's head fell idly back on his shoulder.

"Well, of course, whenever you come to New York, Southward," Morena said on the way home, "I'm at your disposal."

"Thanks," Southward responded, "I'll remember that."

"No, you won't," Morena answered. "But I will. And I'll recall it to you."

"All right," Southward replied indifferently. "You remember it then."

"You're an insulting creature," Morena burst out after a pause in which he studied his companion's inscrutable profile. "I'd like the job of taming you." His mischievous smile made this threat innocuous.

"It would be some job, mister," Southward rejoined imperturbably.

"Oh, I know that all right," Morena agreed. "But let me tell you it will take only a little more of this insolence and I'll make up my mind that I'll try it. And if I make up my mind, it's the same as done." His smile widened and brightened with accessions of his mischievous mood.

"Think so?" Southward questioned.

Morena burst into laughter. He gave the arm nearest him a squeeze that indicated only humorous enjoyment. "You're a great card, little lady."

The lane began to widen. The white fence showed just ahead.

"May I come up to the garret to-night?" Morena asked.

"You may not," Southward answered.

"Please!"

"You may not," Southward insisted implacably. She stopped and began squirting the light from her torch in circles about her.

"Do you mean this is where I get off?" Morena inquired in an incredulous tone.

"I do. Good night!" Southward held out her hand.

"It's not only good night, you know—but good-bye."

"Well, good-bye then."

Morena took the hand. He held it. "You're a heartless little devil, missy." The smile had left his lips and eyes. "You really give no quarter and you deserve none."

Southward made no reply. She squirted her light up into the big bushes and further up into the trees.

"Look at me when you say good-bye," Morena insisted.

Southward looked at him. He was looking intently at her. Everything that was Celtic seemed to have faded from Morena's face; it had become entirely Latin. His voice had changed. "You're one of the most fascinating creatures I ever saw in my life, Southward Drake," he said slowly. "You bewitch me. I don't love you and I don't think I ever would—you're too hard—

but you bewitch me. And I bewitch you a little, although you don't know that yet." He paused but he continued to look hard at her. And Southward, still inundating the shrubbery with flushings of light, continued to look hard at him. He still held her hand. Her palm rested on his, cool as a sliver of slate; but she did not remove it. "We've not done with each other yet, señorita. There's lots of history that we're going to live through together. It's going to be a fight. And I confess I don't know whether you'll win or I. But there's going to be a devil of a scrap some day." He paused. "You don't believe that?"

"No," Southward answered contemptuously, "of course I don't."

A swift dark flash of emotion made his face more deeply Latin.

"Say good-bye to me!" he commanded in an imperious tone.

The hand that held hers so loosely tightened. The arm beyond the hand tautened. A little jerk suddenly pulled Southward forward onto his breast. Before she could move, his lips had dipped close against hers, stayed there. She rested in his arms one quiescent instant, two, three——

Then suddenly she tore herself loose, tore with the fury of a leopardess. She trembled; she panted. Her face was white with rage, but in her big eyes and on her trembling lips lay terror, lay panic. She dropped stammering phrases.

"How dare you—how—I could kill you—I—never—want to see you—as long as you——"

Suddenly she fled to the house.

When Hester came in, the dawn was just pinkening the west. Hester's absent eyes were fixed far ahead. But she moved with quiet. The front door, under her slim hand, shut carefully; the living-room door made no sound. Her foot had just touched the first stair however when her mother's door opened and, candle in hand, Mrs. Crowell appeared on the threshold. She wore a dull-coloured kimono. Her yellowy-white hair in two thick braids, one falling on each shoulder, invested her with a belated girlishness. One long, fine-taloned hand pink against the flame shaded the candle. The light swept up into her face, filmed it with fire. But another light, an interior one, sent outwards at her eyes a stronger glare.

"Well?" she said. And her word was a question.

Hester stared at her. "Well," she repeated, puzzled.

"Have you anything to tell me?" Mrs. Crowell demanded.

"Anything to tell you, mother," Hester repeated in a dazed voice.
"Why, what could I have to tell you?"

The light went out behind Mrs. Crowell's face. "Then what kind of a girl are you?" she demanded, "getting in at this hour of night—or morning? Are you a——"

But Hester had flown up the stairway.

CHAPTER XIV

"WELL, Southward," said Hester.

"Well, Hester," said Southward.

Hester did not speak for a moment, but she gazed intently about the garret, gazed so intently that her look though untranslatable was comment, gazed at everything, the disorderly centre-table, the furniture standing at odds, the dust everywhere. In the interval Southward drew a cigarette from the box, began calmly to smoke. Her gaze wandered too, but without interest; it came finally to Hester.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed suddenly, "what is the matter? What *has* she been doing now? You're as tallowy as a candle."

"Oh, nothing special. It isn't that I'm thinking of now. She thought I had a chance for matrimony. It was a terrible disappointment to her." Hester laughed and, in spite of her wanness, there was real mirth in her laugh.

"It's the garret," Hester went on after a while, "that frightens me now. It doesn't seem like the same place. I'm afraid. I have a feeling that it will never be the same again—our Refuge. I've a feeling that we've exhausted its usefulness. But then, that's not strange. I feel as if we'd exhausted everything. I have a sensation of emptiness and vacancy and silence, as if the whole universe had emptied out." Hester also lighted a cigarette, but mechanically, and she began to pull at it with her characteristic little nervous puffs.

"Heavens knows, I'm restless enough, myself," Southward admitted. "I wander round this garret like a strange cat. I can't adjust myself at all. And then, of course, it *isn't* the same. I feel that I owe you an apology and an explanation, Hester. It isn't a Secret Place any longer. Dwight used to come up here evenings right along. And Morena came once."

"But not together, I take it," Hester emitted a sly gleam.

"No, never. Then of course Mrs. Morrow and her mother, who tried to buy every bit of furniture in it, and Edith. That does spoil the secrecy idea. However, who cares? We were only keeping it secret from boobs. It's served its usefulness. It's got us over a bad period."

"Like a new game in the winter-time," Hester interjected slowly, "that you play and play and play until the very sight of it gives you a feeling of nausea."

"Things have been going so fast these last two weeks that we haven't had any time to talk. I'm dying to know what you think of everybody now—— Let's start right from the beginning and go down the list. Leaving out Mrs. Boardman who, I take it, you found as hard as a stone and as cold as a fish—as I did. By the way grandmother likes her very much. And really, to do her justice, the old shark seemed to take a fancy to grandmother, used to come over here and have long talks with her. Let's begin with Mrs. Morrow. What is your final opinion on her?"

"My last impression is the same as my first," Hester answered. "I can't make up my mind about her to save my life. She fascinates me. I can't keep my eyes off her when she's about. I like her. And yet I distrust her sometimes. Not that she hasn't a sort of splendid generosity. How do you feel?"

"I still hate her," Southward answered, with a vivid enjoyment of her own ferocity, "hate her like the devil. And say, you remember I told you that her name—Azile—was Eliza screwed round. Well, I was right. I've got the goods on her. She had a rich old aunt, Eliza Boardman, whom she expected to inherit a fortune from. The old lady married and left it to her husband though."

"Who told you?"

"Dwight. Of course he hadn't got the mix-up about the name. Men are always so slow about such things, and naturally I didn't peep."

"And Edith?" Hester went on, "what do you make of her?"

"She's sick," Southward said emphatically. "There's something wrong with her, I don't know what. I don't think she knows herself. Sometimes she seemed almost nutty. Did you ever notice how in the morning she'd wander on in the craziest vein?"

"Yes," Hester admitted. "I *did* notice that. I never thought of it particularly as a symptom of illness. She's rather vague often. But I'm sure that she's not quite well. She always says she is though."

"It's nerves," Southward vouchsafed. "She's a strange woman."

"Yes, she's strange," Hester agreed. "But I love her—devotedly.—And Morena," she went on. "I'm interested, Southward, in what you say about him. I never got to know him really; for you see I didn't interest him any more than I did Dwight. He interested me though. I think he's the handsomest man I ever saw

in my life. I should have fallen dead in love with him at sixteen. But there was a kind of strangeness about him. Most of the time I didn't even feel akin to him. And then suddenly. I'd seem to know him as well as you. That was when he was Irish. But sometimes he was all Spanish. Did you notice that?"

Southward was contemplating her feet that swung nervously back and forth during this speech. "Yes, I noticed it," she said in a constrained tone. She seemed to follow some silent trail of thought. Apparently it brought her to futile conclusion; for she brought her clenched fist down hard on the couch. "What do you think of Ripley?" she asked. "Do you like him?"

"Very, very much," Hester declared earnestly. "He was so kind to me and mother. I had such a sense of comfort when he talked with me. It was as easy as though he were another woman and yet he had the man's point of view. I liked that feeling."

"I wonder what the answer to him is," Southward mused in a perplexed voice. "Dwight believes that it was a tragic love-affair. And it is true that I never saw a man who was so impervious to women—he was shell-proof. He won my vote because he wasn't to be taken in by me, notwithstanding he thinks me too pretty to go about unleashed—those were his exact words. I couldn't make a dent on him anywhere. My first trying-out conversation with him was one of the most humiliating experiences I've ever had. I suddenly waked up to the fact that he wasn't looking at me when I talked with him. His eyes were on my face, you understand, but he looked through me. Very disturbing." Southward perceptibly enjoyed her own humiliation. "Now what do you think of Dwight?" she wound up suddenly.

Hester picked up another cigarette. She straightened it, rolled and pressed it in her fingers, tapped it. "I think a lot of him," she said musingly. "He's interesting and able and well-balanced and sane and humorous and kind—except that he's as heartless a young brute as I've ever met."

"Correct!" Southward agreed, "you've got the map of him accurate."

"If something sobering were to happen to him," Hester went on, "it would be a good thing. A grief or a responsibility of some kind."

"Right again, Hester," Southward applauded. "Perhaps your little friend will hand him the jolt he needs."

"Look out he doesn't hand it to you!" Hester warned. "He's ruthless."

Southward laughed triumphantly. "The man doesn't live that

could," she boasted. "They're too easy. I wish God had provided us women with another sex. I'm tired working with this present one. I can beat their game with one hand tied."

"How did Dwight get on with his novel?" Hester asked.

Southward laughed. "He didn't get on with it at all. He'll never finish that novel or any other. He's not really a writer. He only thinks he is."

"He's written one book," Hester remonstrated.

"So have I," replied Southward. "Anybody can write one book."

"Now," Hester asked, "what do you think of John?"

"In a way he's a big person," Southward answered directly. "In a way, he's the best of the boiling." She stopped. "He's full of energy. But I think," she went on slowly, "he lacks punch somehow and someway—I don't exactly know how to describe it."

Dull silence fell. Hester looked down. Southward looked away. Suddenly the two pairs of eyes met.

"I wonder," Hester said, "if they'll ever come again."

"No," Southward answered decidedly, "I don't think so. They're the kind of people who want change."

There was another interval of stealthy silence. The two pairs of eyes wandered. Suddenly again they met.

"I wonder," Hester said, "if we'll ever see them again."

"I wonder too," Southward echoed. "Well, they all seemed genuinely interested to have us come to New York."

"Yes," Hester agreed. She went on talking slowly, and as she talked, her voice deadened gradually. "And yet do you remember how wild those Elliotts were to have us come to see them and how that time we went to call in Boston they didn't know us when they saw us, and how frosty they were when they found out who we were?"

"Yes, I remember," Southward admitted grimly. "Still I really think those people mean it."

"Oh, yes, I *do* believe that," Hester said. "I *can't* for the life of me think anything else." Emphasis livened her voice for the moment.

Another silence fell.

"It would be strange if we never heard another word from one of them," Hester dropped after a long time. Her voice had gone dead again.

"Well, of course, you never can tell," Southward said philosophically. "Hark, what's that? Oh, Charlotte's bell. That means

mail. Wait a moment. I'll be right back." She flew down the stairs.

She returned quickly, a big manilla envelope in one hand and a small package in the other. "Well, we've heard," she said carelessly. "That's Dwight's handwriting. Let's see what's in the package." She slipped the cord off, pulled the wrappings away. There emerged a box of a heavy shiny white cardboard. She opened it, pulled out a cigarette case of silver, monogrammed. "Isn't that a beauty?" she exclaimed. She turned to the letter.

"Well, I must be going," Hester murmured.

"Oh, stay and hear the news," Southward commanded, running a hairpin under the flap of the envelope.

"No, I'll come over later," Hester protested. "Good-bye."

Southward was deep in her letter. "Good-bye," she answered absently. Then, "Oh, Hester," she called abruptly.

Hester was half-way down the stairs. "Yes."

"Remember we're going to New York."

"I don't believe it, Southward."

"Hester, we're *going* to New York."

"All right."

Hester hurried down the South Lane and up the Lower Road to the main street. She entered the Post Office with a swinging tread, passed swiftly to the mail window.

"Nothing for you, Hester," the postmaster said. Hester's step lagged as she emerged. She walked slowly home.

"Any mail?" her mother demanded as she entered the house.

"No," Hester answered in a listless voice.

"Haven't heard from your New York friends yet, have you?" Mrs. Crowell went on relentlessly.

"No."

"I thought you wouldn't," Mrs. Crowell declared.

Hester did not reply.

"Everybody in this town is saying," Mrs. Crowell continued in her even monotone, "that Southward refused that Dwight Cameron but that you didn't get a chance to refuse anybody—that that John Smith didn't come up to the scratch at the last moment."

"If they mean that he did not ask me to marry him, they are quite right," Hester vouchsafed. "You might tell them, if you care, that his attitude towards me was never anything but that of a friend."

"Oh, I don't care," Mrs. Crowell protested. "That isn't what they say. They say he flirted with you all the time."

"They're mistaken," Hester said wearily.

"Who's that turning into the gate?" Mrs. Crowell asked. "Oh, Libbie Hatch. Hullo, Libbie. Glad to see you! Come in!"

Libbie came in, her earrings swinging with her quick, brisk trot. "Well, I saw you go by, Hester," she panted, "I was at Mis' Snow's. I called from the porch but you didn't hear me. I tried to catch up with you but I couldn't—Land sakes, how you do *pelt*! I stopped in for your mail, knowing I was coming here. These are for you, Hester."

She handed Hester a package and a letter.

Hester disappeared, floating swiftly up the stairs.

The letter was brief.

Dear Hester,

I have not written simply because I have not had a moment. I want to thank you for the summer. I never had one like it before and I shall never have one like it again. I'm sending you a book—you said once that you had never read it. It is one of my favourites.

John.

The book was *Peter Ibbetson*.



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BOOK THREE

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BOOK THREE

CHAPTER I

"**THERE** they are!" Southward exclaimed. And her face that had been a little shadowed with uncertainty lightened with a triumphant smile. She waved her hand.

"Where?" Hester asked. The word came in a gasp. Her hand went out and clutched Southward's arm for support. But before Southward could speak, Hester's face changed; her cataclysmic blush filled its hollows, her smile illuminated its contours.

Dwight and John darted through the big waiting crowd in the Grand Central Station and shook hands.

"The *Planet* has sent me up here, Miss Drake," Dwight stated formally, "to ask you how you like New York."

"Oh, very much," Southward answered with an equal formality. "Tell the readers of the *Planet* that I am charmed with the metropolis. It's so like dear Paris."

Dwight laughed. "You're on!" he exclaimed. He continued to laugh as he took her arm. But obviously his laughter was merely the foam of an oncoming tide of good spirits. He steered her dexterously through the crowd. This was an easy process. People gave way instinctively before the tall, vigorous, well-dressed young man whose whole attitude breathed arrogant command and whose mischievous blue eyes so pleasantly re-enforced that arrogance. "Well," he said and his tone was half exultation and half relief, "you're here."

"Yes," Southward returned and her tone was half triumph and half gaiety, "I'm here."

"Your letters have been bully."

"Well, for that matter, your own letters have been pretty good."

"God knows, I tried to entertain you." He looked at her critically. "You've lost some of your tan."

"Of course. I always do in the winter."

"You're thinner too."

"A little. You look well."

"I'm feeling grand and fit. John kept after me when I got home from Shayneford and I've been going to a gym regularly—boxing

and swimming. Getting in trim for your visit, you see. It'll be some visit, believe me. I'm going to rip New York open from the Bronx to the Battery."

"Thanks. I shall enjoy that process. How's the novel going?"

"Oh, that one—not at all. But a new one's going fine. You see after I got away from Shayneford, it was pretty hard to keep up the atmosphere. I'll have to go there again sometime, But don't let's talk about that now. I'll give you a spiel about the novel later."

"All right. Oh—say—before I forget it," Southward veered off the course for an instant. "Can you tell me about that big German oculist Greinschmidt that the papers are so full of at present? Is he going to make a long visit to this country?"

"Yes, several months, I think. Why?"

"A friend of mine wants to consult him."

"He's going West immediately. I'll keep an eye on him," Dwight promised. "I'll tell you when he comes back."

There fell a pause. It was not, however, so much lack of conversation as that Dwight fixed his companion with another interested and critical scrutiny. "Lord, you are a pretty thing," he exclaimed. And he continued to look at her with a cool steadiness which had a touch of deliberate impertinence. She returned the look in kind. Their glances met, sparkled into mirth.

They stopped in the doorway, waiting for the others. Southward stared about her. "Heavens, what a racket! Oh, and isn't that building tall! Let me count. Twelve stories. I'm crazy about the skyscrapers. When I was here before, I used to stand for hours watching them building one on Fourth Avenue. How I used to envy those men working so high in the air. I've seen them go sailing like a bird on a girder. I'd have given anything to do that. Say, do you suppose I could take a trip in a flying machine while I'm here?"

"Gee, you're a hard-headed young woman. It makes me dizzy just to think of such heights. But don't waste any time on these mushroom growths. Wait till I show you the Metropolitan Tower and the Woolworth Building and the Singer. Say, they're some pumpkins."

But Southward's eyes, as though involuntarily impelled, continued to scale one after another the buildings that surrounded them.

The other two were following at a slower pace, Hester obviously bewildered. "Does it confuse you, Hester, all this noise?" John asked.

"Oh, very much," Hester answered. "I'm dazed. It doesn't seem real. But then I've been living in a dream ever since it was decided that we were to come. I feel as though I'd like to reach out and touch something solid. It's very queer—that sensation—there's a kind of giddiness to it. I feel a little as you do at the beginning of sickness, as though there weren't a solid foundation under your feet. Still I hope if it is a dream that I won't wake up. Is this really a *station*? What a wonderful place it is! Like a palace. Are those the signs of the Zodiac? It makes it all the more like a dream—or a vision perhaps—to enter New York through this wonderful gateway."

John laughed. "I won't wake you up," he promised. "How are you?" He examined her searchingly while she answered.

"I feel better," Hester replied. "Ever since mother said that I could go away, I've felt better."

Her blush had faded. Now she was colourless, almost bloodless. The lines of her profile cut stark through her skin. Every shadow was a purple hollow. Every line was a brown furrow.

"Your mother wanted you to come to New York then?"

"Yes. She proposed it. Mother's been very kind ever since my illness. And then things happened just right for me. A relative of Mrs. Drake's wrote and asked if she could come to Shayneford to spend the winter. That gave Southward a chance to leave. When she came over to ask me if I could go, mother proposed I should before Southward could get the words out of her mouth. You see the doctor had told mother that I ought to have a change. I got leave of absence from the school for a year. I had some money of my own saved up and mother gave me some more, a hundred and fifty dollars. Southward and I can stay as long as our money lasts."

"We'll see that it lasts a long time," John turned a sobered glance from her face for a moment, "I suppose you know that you are in our hands for the day. Dwight and I constituted ourselves a committee of entertainment, the instant we got your letters, saying you were coming. You're to have a party of welcome at my place to-morrow night. I'm afraid we've laid out a pretty exhausting program for you to-day. Perhaps I'd better tell Dwight that, we must cut some of it out."

Hester stayed him with a quick clutch on his arm. "Oh, don't," she entreated. "I want to get tired. I don't sleep very well. I haven't slept for more than a few hours for nights and nights and nights. I want to get so tired that I'll sleep like a log. And

besides, Southward will want to do everything you've planned. Please."

"All right," John said, "the original schedule goes. We're taking you to your rooms first."

They continued to wind about the groups that dotted the main hall of the mammoth station. At times Dwight and Southward seemed to disappear, but John always found their trail. Reunited, they came out finally into the blinding glare of the brilliant November day into that welter of sharp contrasts, of tall buildings with short, of foreign faces with native, of opulence with dinginess, of wealth with poverty which is the New York scene, into that mixture of hurry, confusion, noise, transitoriness, and incompleteness which is its atmosphere. Above stretched a sky, as smoothly shining as a sheet of blue metal. The air was clear, crisp, electric; its tingle flashed through the blood, brought colour to the face, light to the eyes. In the street, a tangle of traffic jarred and jangled from curb to curb. On the sidewalk the crowd stretched from gutters to buildings. That crowd drew Dwight and Southward into its current, submerged them, and bore them smoothly onward. John and Hester plunged in after them, crossed the street.

"Which one was it, John?" Dwight called. "Where in thunder did that—oh, here he is!"

Out of the flood of moving vehicles in the street, a taxi churned to the sidewalk and came to a boiling quiet beside them.

Dwight called the address. He helped the girls in. The two men seated themselves with their backs to the driver. The taxi dived expertly into the flood of vehicles.

"Well," Dwight remarked easily. "This is New York."

"Yes." Southward echoed this statement with equal ease. Her smile of delight filled her face with sparkle. "This is New York again. The last time I was here——" A jagged flash of expression as of a remembered horror cut out the sparkle from her air for an instant. Her eyes met Dwight's in a gleam of understanding. The terror disappeared. She gave a quick glance at Hester and John who were looking out one window together. "This is New York," she repeated. "Get that skyscraper, Hester. Fifteen stories. Think of it, Hester. New York!"

"I don't quite believe it though," Hester said almost inaudibly. Her eyes went to the sidewalk, like an overloaded escalator, streaming past them. Her glance came back swiftly as though the sight were too alien to be sustained with comfort. It sought John's face and clung there.

"You seem to believe it, Southward," Dwight commented.

"Oh, I've believed it ever since last summer," Southward announced tranquilly. "The things that I want to happen do happen—that's all." She craned out the window. "Twelve," she said meditatively after a tiny pause in which her glance rapidly scaled a skyscraper. And in another second with the excitement of discovery, "Sixteen stories—sixteen!" Then after a long pause in a loud peremptory tone. "Sit on his head, one of you! Horse down!" she turned to explain briefly. "They'll never get him up that way. See what a lovely street, Hetter. Looks a little like Commonwealth Avenue."

"Yes, I'm staring at it," Hester answered, "but I'm afraid I'm not seeing it."

"Park Avenue," Dwight explained.

"I know just what you're going through, Hester," John said. "For the first three years that I lived here, it was like going to a different planet every time I came back to New York. I can't get that feeling now to save my life. And let me tell you I miss it. Keep it as long as you can, Hester."

"*Keep it*," Hester burst into unexpected articulateness. "It's keeping me."

The taxi chugged across an avenue, dirty and crowded but broad, to a street, dirty and crowded too but narrow; churned towards a big cream-coloured building made of a smooth mottled brick with metal fire-escapes zigzagging down its front; boiled up to the curb; stopped dead.

Dwight leaped out, paid the man. "There's your letter-box over there in the corner," John said as he pushed open the door. "And, as I live, two letters!"

The row of brass boxes, set into the marble of the vestibule, were choked with letters, dodgers, picture postcards. Above one of them was a slip of cardboard neatly printed with the two names, Miss Southward Drake, Miss Hester Crowell. John drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, inserted one in the lock of the box; the little door swung back.

"One for you, Hester," Southward said, seizing the letters.

"From Edith," John commented. "I recognise the stationery."

"And one for me," Southward added.

"From Azile," Dwight gave it a careless glance, "I recognise the writing."

John opened the inner door with another key from his collection. "Now brace yourself," he warned them. "Five flights!"

The flights were easy ones with landings half-way up. The country-girls skimmed them like birds. Southward's eye caught

examiningly on every detail of the upward journey; the stone steps a little littered, the dumb-waiters, loaded with unsightliness, the open doors which gave glimpses into shadowy, cluttered interiors, the people who passed. But Hester moved swiftly up the five flights without fatigue apparently but apparently also without observation.

John opened the door on the sixth floor. "Welcome home!" he said as he swung it back. He led them into a narrow dark passageway.

"There's your living-room." He pointed to a tiny room at the right, and proceeding rapidly straight ahead, "Here's your kitchen."

Hester stood stockstill holding her look of a dazed wonder.

But Southward was characteristically present-minded. She darted first to the big window, pulled aside the curtains that screened them from a pour of sun. It opened on a square interior court. Across were red tiled roofs; above a patchwork, blue and white, of cloud and sky. "Looks like pictures of Italian towns," Southward commented. "I like it, don't you, Hester?"

But Hester did not speak. Very slowly she nodded.

Southward dashed through the other two rooms, a tiny bedroom and a bathroom. She opened the closet doors. She stood for an instant silent, looking keenly about, examining the furniture, measuring heights and lengths. "I think this is great," she commented.

"I knew you'd like it," John said. "Miss Winthrop, from whom you are subletting it, found it very pleasant here. Remember the rent is four-fifty a week and that they come round weekly, not monthly, to collect. By the way, Azile and Dwight stopped in yesterday and stocked the place with ice and groceries and eats of various descriptions."

"That was very thoughtful of Mrs. Morrow," Southward turned a level glance on Dwight.

"She was no end of help," Dwight replied, idly surveying the court. "She spent the whole day at it and she was so bewitched by the place that, instead of going out to meals with me—as she was invited to do—she stayed here and cooked luncheon and dinner. At least that was her description of it later, though it seems to me I did the cooking."

John was in the meantime examining the refrigerator, explaining to Hester the uses of the gas stove and the lift in the hall. "Now, girls," he concluded abruptly, "Dwight and I are going over to

the Club to get our mail. We'll be back in three-quarters of an hour. Remember the rest of the afternoon and evening belong to us."

"How about a little walk before dinner?" John asked when, prompt to the second, they rejoined the girls.

"We'd love it," Southward answered with an immediate spark of vivacity. "At least it's up to Hester. Remember though, Hester, you're not to let yourself get tired out."

"I want to get tired out if you'll let me," Hester pleaded humbly. "I would like to go to bed dead as a log. Yes, let's walk."

"Oh, we'll agree to tire you all right," Dwight promised cheerily.

They struck across town. On Fifth Avenue, the purple street lights just beginning to glow through the soft vaporous dusk, produced the effect of colour not light, like flowers cut from pearls and amethysts. The sidewalks were crowded; idle people sauntering; smartly dressed women and no less smartly dressed men, some with the easy grace, the careful dressing, the immaculate grooming, the accent of personality, the studied unconsciousness which marks stage people; the others an indiscriminate ruck of men-and-women-about-town, demi-mondaines, store-girls, outlanders: busy people hurrying; girls with hat-boxes, messenger-boys with flowers, pale readers from the Library, human wreckage from the slums. Occasional lace-peddlers, squatting on the sidewalks, held up their wares to the passers-by, giving the scene an air oddly foreign; occasional beggars whipped through the crowd, furtively asking for alms and adding another touch as strangely un-American. These human streams netted the sidewalks with colour, light, motion. The street was caught in another web of glitter and glare, a jam of fashionable motor traffic. It divided into two parallel lines of sparkling jet—that jam of motor traffic—one going north, the other going south. But whatever its direction, its burden never varied, pampered female flesh, exquisitely draped and ornamented. All this was wedged between a double line of shop windows, flaunting a display delicately or exotically voluptuous; gowns, laces, veils, scarfs, hats, artificial flowers, gloves, jewels, all of the most fragile and most expensive materials, a display which explained perfectly the women in the motors. At one end the sharp relentless prow of the Flatiron Building cut the seething flood in two streams; at the other the huge, softly-furry bank of the Park trees made mystery of its disappearance.

They walked north on one side to the high, grey, lacy-spined pile of the Cathedral and south on the other to the flat, white, lion-guarded mass of the Library. For a time, the crowd seemed to increase. The men were kept busy pointing out celebrities. Southward recognised a face here and there; and continually she called Hester's attention to the signs of firms that they had known hitherto only through advertisement.

Hester talked little and always in low tones. But excitement had begun to mount in her. Superficially she looked better. Her cheeks glowed with a deep pink that had a purplish tinge, as though the whipping November air were warm, not cold; her eyes gleamed with a perpetual surprise. "Where do all these people come from?" she asked.

John who for the most part watched her, laughed.

"Nobody knows. There are endless reservoirs in New York, and the Avenue seems to tap them all."

"I have enjoyed the books very much," Hester said timidly after a silence, "and the magazines."

John smiled. "I hope they made a rebel of you."

Hester shook her head. "I'm too afraid. But I read them all. They terrified me. I can't believe them. But I did read every word. Some things I had to read over and over again before I got a glimmer of an idea what they were about. I've made out a list of phrases that I want you to explain to me."

"I'll do that gladly. Why didn't you write and ask?"

"I didn't want to bother you," Hester answered almost inaudibly. "It would have meant a lot of writing for you—there were so many of them and some of them so complicated. It would have been like writing an A B C manual of socialism, anarchism, syndicalism, and feminism."

"I should have enjoyed doing that for you, Hester."

Silence again fell. John broke it presently.

"I've enjoyed your letters, Hester. You write wonderful letters. It is extraordinary, that gift of correspondence which women have to so much greater a degree than men. They make the most commonplace happenings seem like epic history. It's a gift quite different from the creative art as such. Your letters are astonishingly full of that sort of thing. Take Tabby for instance—I followed her fate and the fate of her two families with breathless interest. I was so afraid you wouldn't find a home for Mr. Roosevelt that I very nearly telegraphed you to express him on here. Yes, you are some letter writer."

"Oh, do you really think so?"

"Yes. Let me see. I have five of your letters I think—nice long ones."

"Yes, you must have. I have five of yours."

"I wanted more of course—and many times I—— But I knew I hadn't the right to involve a woman so busy in a correspondence." John's voice had faltered at the beginning of this speech, but it ended in a crisp controlled accent as of one who talks business.

At Forty-first Street they turned west. "Oh, Hetter," Southward exclaimed joyfully, "just think we're going to be on Broadway together at last."

"You say it," Hester answered tensely. "I hear your words and I see your lips move, but I don't believe it. I can't."

They passed to the rear of the Library, cut through Bryant Park, across Sixth Avenue through Forty-second Street. They stopped on the corner and the two girls frankly looked up and down the street. It contrasted in every way—and in every way to its disadvantage—with the Avenue they had just left; it was meagre, in aspect narrow and dirty. Everywhere was swift noisy movement; crowds with a more business-like air covering the sidewalks; cars, drays, taxis, motors choking the streets. Twilight had come definitely. On both sides, as far as the eye could reach, the lights were on; the façades of many of the buildings were so heavily jewelled that they turned the night to a silver white day. To the complexity of movement, gigantic electric signs, constantly changing, added their noiseless confusion. The side streets, a blare of light at their intersection with Broadway, seemed to thicken gradually until they were tunnels of impenetrable gloom, except where, high up, an elevated train flashed a noiseless golden ribbon across the purple dark, or where, even higher, an occasional lighted window in a skyscraper seemed to paste an orange patch on the very heavens.

Southward, quick, laconic, concise—and always gay—made comment on everything, and Dwight looked at the things she indicated as from a new point of view. But Hester, without speaking, stared about her and John, in much the same kind of silence, looked at Hester.

"After all, Hetter," Southward turned once to say, "Broadway itself is rather a cheap performance, isn't it?"

"Good for you, Southward," Dwight applauded. "I knew they wouldn't put this dingy lane over on you." He smiled as with a personal triumph. "The Great White Way, the Alleys of Stars—the Putrid Pike would describe it better."

"They're putting it over on me," Hester admitted. And again

she flared into an uncharacteristic articulateness. "I can't tell you whether I'm floating on a rainbow or walking through a kaleidoscope."

"Good for you, Hester," John applauded in his turn. "That's what they're always doing to me. Let them put it over on you. It won't hurt you."

"How about dinner?" Dwight inquired suddenly.

"Suits me," John said. "Here we are at the Pat."

The open doorway of the looming white building, light-encircled at the roof, offered a spreading shelter of wrought iron and glass at its base. Under this, and at the end of a carpeted path, a negro, huge, bronzed, green-uniformed, swung a revolving door with the regularity of an automaton. Swept centrifugally inwards, they came into a wide, brilliant lobby where together men and women sat and chatted—and waited; or stood and chatted—and waited; or alone sat and stood—and waited. The atmosphere was hectic with colour, sparkle, perfume, laughter, chatter, silken rustlings, the heady excitement of extravagant spending, waiting, and *rendezvous*. Through openings that the shifting crowd made, a dining-room displayed here a fairyland of mural decoration and there a Renaissance splendour of flower, fruit, rainbow patisserie, favours, piled high on a big round table. Waiters hurried noiselessly across the scene.

"This hotel is eighteen stories high," Southward announced.

"The grill?" questioned John.

"The grill," answered Dwight.

They moved to the right, into a room very simple and quiet, seats lining the wall. At the door, a waiter met them. "Four," said Dwight. Hester stood, rooted, gazing about her. But Southward, with a quick movement, put herself ahead of her. "Follow me, Hetter!" she breathed. As though mechanically propelled, Hester moved on. The men brought up the rear. The waiter led the procession to a corner. Other waiters sprang to the table, snatched the chairs away.

"Not too near the music," Dwight said without expression as though this was the regular formula. The head waiter indicated another table.

"All right," Dwight agreed. Waiters again snatched chairs away. "You girls take the wall seats, please—we'll take the ends." They settled themselves. Dwight leisurely surveyed the room. He pointed out a celebrity or two.

"What wonderful-looking women," Hester exclaimed, "I didn't know women could be so beautiful."

John smiled his pleasant understanding smile. He too turned and surveyed the room. "I used to feel that way. But somehow nowadays New York women look so artificial to me that, subconsciously I accept them as so much stage-setting. If you want my unbiassed opinion, I think the two most attractive women in the room are at our table."

"Sure," Dwight agreed. He added in an undertone to Southward, "You put it all over them."

The boyish simplicity with which Southward dressed made her an effective figure anywhere, but in contrast with the artificial vari-coloured splendours of Broadway, she had something of a military smartness and plainness. Her trim suit of navy-blue serge was without decoration of any kind, except for the triangles of white china-silk blouse which at the neck turned over its lapels. The crown of her plain black hat was small but it sank low on her head. The rim rolled down low at the sides and the back but shot up in front, and high—an effect supplemented by a long, white, sharp-pointed wing. It revealed, that flare upwards, the whole of her beautiful brow, the dipping bands of hair, sleek as a bird's breast, and underneath the profile bold as a hawk's. There was a change in Southward, however, a change so impalpable as to be almost imperceptible. She was thinner, more restless. Into the calm and clarity of her gaze had come a question, as though the stream of her thought rippled eternally over a snag.

Southward would inevitably attract attention, whatever her costume, if only for the *verve* of her colouring, the audacity of her look, the spirit that emanated from every movement. She would always dominate the social atmosphere until it became mere setting for her. And to-night all these qualities seemed emphasised in her. She flashed from pose to pose with the swiftness of a woman at a high point of excitement.

Hester, on the other hand, would attract attention nowhere, would inevitably sink deeper and deeper into her background until it absorbed her. Still though a quiet figure, she was a pleasing one. She could not possibly mimic Southward's instinctive *chic* but evidently from its air of quiet taste somebody had overseen her dressing. Her modest brown suit, though palpably ready-made, was at least innocuous. Her hair had been done in a new and more becoming way, two long braids that encircled her head. The big wide, low-crowned brown hat with its single uncurled brown plume fitted perfectly into the composition. Her long, slim hands looked distinguished in their long, black gloves.

All this time, the waiter stood at Dwight's elbow, presenting

menus and emitting the slight deferential coughs and movements that were calculated to bring this difficult party to a knowledge of its duty.

"A cocktail?" Dwight said finally, looking at Southward.

"Yes," Southward answered promptly. "Hester, get that hat over in the corner."

"You too, Hester?" Dwight asked.

Hester looked terrified. "I don't know. I never tasted a cocktail in my life. What will it do to me?"

Dwight laughed. "Oh, nothing in particular—except to cast a pale-pink glow over life. Come on, Hester, be a sport."

Southward's amused laugh rippled out. "Make her, Dwight," she advised. "In the garret, I always kept a bottle of cocktails for myself. But Hester would never drink anything stronger than the elderberry we put up. Come on, Hester, the time has come to take the fatal plunge."

"Don't unless you want to," interposed John.

Hester looked more and more uncertain, more and more miserable, John more and more sympathetic. Southward and Dwight continued quite openly to enjoy the situation. Even Hester began to enjoy it at last. "I can't describe how I feel," she said, smiling, but with a troubled brow. "It's as though I were giving my soul to everlasting perdition. And yet of course I want to drink a cocktail. I've got to begin sometime. I'm afraid of what it will do and yet I want to see what it will do. Yes, I'll take one."

"Well, if you have to be carried out after one cocktail," Dwight reassured her, "John and I guarantee that it will be done with the minimum of publicity. What do you girls want to eat?"

"Oh, go ahead and order, Dwight!" John commanded. "Don't bother them! They don't know whether they're on their heads or their heels. They'll eat anything or everything or nothing. It's great." His face clouded. "I'm so sorry that Edith is missing this. She would love it."

"I'm so sorry too," Hester said. "Why didn't she come?"

"I begged her to come but she wouldn't. She said that it would be too much of a crowd if others came trailing along and would only blur your first impressions. Then she thought the long evening would tire her—she gets tired so easily nowadays. I really am very worried about Edith. Azile, as it happened, had an unbreakable engagement for the early part of the evening. She was heartbroken. She was crazy to join the party."

Dwight was in the meantime ordering with the assistance of the waiter, who expressed a sympathy almost tender with his

divagations, oysters, chicken Maryland, a salad, ices, patisserie, coffee, and cheese. When the oysters came, they had to teach Hester how to dress them. This was accomplished with much mirth, even from her. She announced that she liked them.

"Southward," Hester exclaimed suddenly between courses, "there's a woman smoking over there."

Southward swept the party with her alert appraising glance. "So she is!" she said. Her hand sought her coat-pocket. She pulled out a silver cigarette-case, pressed the spring. The waiter brought her a light.

Dwight smiled. "They won't put anything over on you."

There was a faint note of exultation in his tones. His air was that of the man whose horse has won the race.

"Are you going to smoke, Hester?" Southward asked.

"No," Hester announced with determination. "I'm not going to have to think of anything to-night but what I'm looking at."

It was getting towards the theatre-hour when they emerged from the hotel. The confusion on Broadway had increased a hundred-fold. The sidewalks were crowded with cross-currents of pedestrianism; the streets were filled with cross-currents of traffic. And as the confusion had increased, so immeasurably had increased the noise, colour, light—that quality in the atmosphere of lavish pleasure-seeking; gay or cynical or perfunctory, but always luxurious and unthinking. They walked slowly north. At the Circle, they turned and walked slowly south. Dwight and Southward kept up their continual comment but it was a long time before Hester spoke. "What is this place?" she asked faintly after a while.

"The Metropolitan Opera House," John answered.

"May I stop here a moment and watch?" Hester said this in a tone of excitement that had even its note of irritation, as though she must hold to one stable detail for a moment or submit to mental anarchy.

"Of course," John answered. "Tell us when you've had enough, Hester."

They stopped. Dwight and Southward snapped comments back and forth, comments that were full of veiled impudence, an obvious joy in that impudence; interrupted by sudden jets of laughter. Hester, silent, moveless—rapt—drank the spectacle down. And John, much amused and yet with an undercurrent of sympathetic understanding in his look, watched Hester.

It was always the same, that spectacle. A glossy file of motors,

like an interminable carefully-articulated serpent whose tail stretched around the corner, followed the curve of the curb. It inched continually nearer until the head lay in front of the entrance. When it stopped, the door of the first motor flew open and a man—or two—in the glossy black, the stark white of evening clothes leaped out, extended assisting hands. A woman—or two—one embodied glisten of evening gown, evening wrap, bared flesh, silken ankle, and many jewels, bending an elaborate coiffure to avoid the door-top, reached a cautious glittering foot to the carpeted sidewalk. The deserted motor chopped itself off from the file, scuttled away, lost itself in the crowded street. The serpent inched nearer.

"I'm ready to go," Hester said with a sigh after a while. "But, Southward, let's come over here every evening and watch this. I never saw such gowns and coats and slippers in my life—or such jewels. Sometimes I've seen things like them in shop windows in Boston, but this is the first time I've seen people wearing them. I see now that I never realised that they really did wear them."

"All right," Southward agreed, "every night at this hour will find us here." She laughed and her gay, clear laughter, unaccustomedly warm, held a wave of sympathy. Apparently, by this time she had caught the degree of Hester's sense of adventure.

"Here we take a car," Dwight ordered.

They rode down below Twenty-third Street, alighted, walked east. John halted them finally in front of a house of which only the area windows were lighted. He led the way into a little front yard, pushed open a door there, conducted them through a dim hall, pushed open another door. They stepped into a room, crowded with people, ablaze with light, and fogged with smoke.

At the further end was a small platform. One young woman, her hands idly clasped, occupied a chair at a desk. Another, taking notes on a pad, sat beside her. A third, standing between them, addressed the audience. She too was young; she spoke quickly, facilely, eloquently.

Southward's eyes went to the speaker, surveyed her from head to heel. She studied the other women on the platform with one of her long keen looks. She examined the audience with one of her quick sweeping glances. Finally her attention returned to the speaker. She listened attentively. But Hester's eyes, alighting nowhere, wandered with a look of stupefaction back and forth many times over the room.

The audience was prevailingly youthful, proletarian, and alien.

Here through the smoke bulked, purple-black, the head of a young girl, who might have been of any nationality, her profile almost buried in her abundant hair. There, tired, wrung, tallowy, the face of a boy displayed the virile lines of the Hebraic contour. Everywhere, fiery, in spite of the smile, glittered the eyes of Russia, like loaded revolvers. Working men and women—older—sagged on the benches, tired and sodden. Leisure-class men and women—at least leisure seemed to be predicated by their clothes—listened, but without so much a sense either of fatigue or of revelation. Faces that had been paled and thinned by culture or by vision filled in the hiatus between these masses.

Middle age, energised by rebellion, helped to make that human blend and old age still desperately demanding an answer to its questions. But youth made the body of it: youth, fresh, ringing; youth, high-coloured; youth, dare-devil.

The speaker went on. Southward continued to listen attentively. For a long time, Hester did not seem to hear. Then apparently her ear found the voice, caught a phrase here and there. Deliberately she seemed to concentrate on it. She turned her gaze in its direction.

“ . . . resent that phrase . . . *girl-mothers*. There are no distinctions between mothers. They are all mothers . . . just that—*mothers*. The woman who brings a healthy child into the world is doing the state the best service she knows. Fatherhood is free. Motherhood is bound. Rewards and honours go with motherhood occasionally but only when convention has sanctioned it. They should go with it always. Our world has heaped two indignities on women. It has refused maternity to some and has forced it on others. People talk so much nowadays about the rights of women. There are only a few inalienable rights—one is the right to motherhood.”

Here Dwight snapped his watch open. “Time’s up,” he whispered to John. “That is if you wish to keep to the program.”

“I do,” John answered. He led the way into the street. They walked west.

“Gee, was that woman crazy?” Southward demanded. And before Dwight could answer. “Oh, look, Hester.” She pointed north.

Up into the black, star-sheened dome of the sky leaped a tower, square, bulky, many-windowed, an enormous monolith of white granite with, near the top, the huge Cyclops eye of time. Beside it, carved, starred, graceful, soared another; a slender shaft of brown stone whose tip imprinted a Diana figure on the sky.

"The Metropolitan Tower," Dwight informed her. "And Madison Square Garden."

"Wait till I count the stories in that big one," Southward ordered. Hester stared at the two towers but it was evident that she did not see them. "What was that meeting?" she asked John.

"A Socialist Local," John answered.

CHAPTER II

"WHAT time is it?" John asked.

"Nine," Dwight replied, "we'll just about make it."

"Let's take a taxi there to be sure," John suggested. He signalled to a driver across the way.

"Now where are we going?" Southward inquired.

"No questions answered to-night," Dwight disposed of her.

"All right." Southward only laughed. "I like it better this way. Isn't it wonderful, Hetter?"

"Wonderful!"

They drove over to Broadway, then north, then west. The taxi stopped in front of a narrow dark alley.

Dwight led the file to the end of this alley. There, an open doorway inserted a rectangle of yellow light in what looked like a high cliff of red stone. Inside, a man was standing. John handed him a card. He looked at it. "All right," he snapped.

"Now don't any of you speak until I give you permission," Dwight ordered. His eye wandered over the party, passing with assurance from John's face to Southward's. "You're the only one I'm uncertain of, Hester. Can you keep perfectly quiet?"

"Oh, yes," Hester promised.

"No matter what happens?" Dwight said with an undertone of seriousness.

"No matter what happens," Hester assured him.

"Then we're off!" Dwight continued to lead the procession as it proceeded up a narrow winding stairway of perforated iron. They came into a large open space where men, women, and children, all with hats and coats on, were standing still and quiet. Just ahead flared a light. Silently Dwight and John drew the girls into the crowd.

Presently, a little active, red-headed man bustled up. "All right now!" he said in a low irritated whisper. "Hurry up! Hurry up there! Get a move on!" The crowd stirred, billowed, moved. Southward and Hester moved with it. They came on a big stage. At the back spread a drop painted with a view of the ocean. In front hung a curtain. Between drop and curtain stretched a train of cars. Automatically the crowd climbed into them.

"Get in here, Southward," Dwight whispered. Southward leaped in. John assisted the unquestioning Hester. The two men seated themselves beside the girls.

"Where are we?" Hester asked John, but heedful of Dwight's injunction, she spoke without voice.

"You'll see in a moment," John answered, his lips close to her ear. "Don't speak whatever happens."

Southward was in the meantime taking expert cognizance of everything, the painted drop at the back, the vacant wings, the machinery above, the scuttling stage-hands. Suddenly a bell rang. The curtain rose slowly. From beyond it flashed a row of faces, clear, then another row less clear, a third row vaguely sketched in, then row on row of shapeless pink blurs; then monstrous looming darkness. There came a quick sharp hand-clapping that grew to a roar. The wheels of the car revolved madly. But the cars stood still. The back drop raced by, unrolling a continuous panorama of scenery. And yet they stood still. And then suddenly—crash! Ahead a car fell to pieces as neatly as a cigar-box hit by an axe. The sides of their own car fell away and down as though they had been playing cards. The passengers jumped out nimbly. Dwight assisted Southward. John took care of Hester. Again that quick sharp clapping grew to a monstrous roar; but this time it seemed to sweep the crowd off the stage. Dwight led the way downstairs into the open air.

"What was that?" Southward asked in what was for her a subdued tone. Hester apparently could not speak.

"You have just taken part in the train-wreck scene of 'The Queen's Kohinoor,'" Dwight explained.

"Now where are we going?" It was Hester who asked this time.

"No questions answered to-night," Dwight reminded her. "Oh, here's a taxi."

The taxi sped north and then east. It stopped, at John's signal, on a corner. He paid the man and dismissed him. They walked further east half a block, halted in front of a large building whose doorways, wreathed with electric lights and flanked by two futurist posters in green and black and yellow and gold, opened on a tall broad flight of stairs.

Dwight led the way upwards. Music came curling down to meet them; faint at first, then deeper, louder, until a door opening suddenly let out a smashing blare of ragtime. Beyond that door, swift in detail, slow in mass, moved a mob of dancers in fancy

costume. It was as though an enormous huddle of picture clothes, floating hair, masked faces, were being revolved by a gigantic churn. The door shut. Dwight led them into a room opposite. There, bewilderingly confused, stretched two walls, hung with costumes, and below counters covered with makeup material, masks, wigs, properties of all descriptions.

As they entered, a quartette of circus performers, sitting at one side, silent, moveless as statues, suddenly arose together and with a concerted movement removed their masks; stood smiling.

"On behalf of the Borough of Manhattan," began the handsome green-and-black, white-ruffed, silver-spangled contortionist who was Morena O'Reilly. But he could get no further. Edith and Azile and Ripley burst into a staccato confusion of greeting and question.

After a while they provided Southward and Hester with masks and dominoes; the whole party went upstairs to the dance hall. John found a box in the balcony, which overlooked the floor; and sitting about a table there, they ate and drank. Hester did not leave the box for the rest of the evening, but Southward, long before she had finished eating, had yielded to Cameron's suggestion that they dance. She came back from time to time to tell Hester something of her adventures, but the instant the music struck up again she was off on the wing. In a quarter of an hour she had become as integral a part of the occasion as though she had been there from the beginning. Dwight and Morena brought their friends to her for introduction. But following the convention of the occasion, she danced, waiving the preliminary of an introduction, with anybody who asked her.

"Do you see those two men over there—the acrobats, the ones I've just been talking with?" she said to Hester in one of her flitting expeditions into the box. Back of her tiny lace mask, the blue-and-black eyes were all light. Above her flame-coloured domino, her dense hair was like carved jet. "They have been teasing me to give them my name and address. At first I wouldn't. The tall one is a Mr. Ely, the other a Mr. Horne. But they kept at me so that finally I told Ely my name and made him swear he wouldn't tell Horne. Then I gave Horne my address and made him swear he wouldn't tell Ely. So that between them, you see, they have all the necessary statistics, but they can't compare notes because they're pledged not to do it. I am having a great time with them."

Another time she thrust her wrist under Hester's eyes. On it was a bracelet, a plain band of black onyx. "Somebody put

that on my arm while he was dancing with me," she explained. "I don't know who it was and he has probably forgotten it himself by this time. It looks as though it belonged to me now."

Each time that Southward returned to the floor it seemed that she plunged into its gaiety with a greater degree of abandon. Her high spirits did not evaporate as the night wore on; rather they increased; and her strength seemed equal to any inroads on it. She danced almost without cessation. Azile—as a snake-charmer in yellow she was a brilliant note of colour even in that brilliant scene—was equally engaged. Edith did not dance. She sat upstairs with Hester. She said she was tired and looked it. She wore a Cossack costume, green, banded with black fur and frog-trimmed; high boots; a piquant fur cap. Her make-up was so thick and vivid that she wore no mask; under it, however, she showed lined and hollow. Hester said she was tired too, but it was not so evident in her case. The hot close air brought to her cheeks the same kind of flush, thick and purple pink, that the afternoon had laid there. Her eyes grew several shades deeper and her hair seemed to foam like fire delicately stranded into thread flame.

"Are you getting too tired, Hester?" Southward asked again and again.

"Yes, I'm tired," Hester always answered, "as tired as I can be. But it's the kind of fatigue I want. And I wouldn't leave for anything on earth."

At three o'clock in the morning, the two girls tumbled into bed. Five minutes later, Hester sank into the first dreamless sleep of months.

She awoke suddenly. She sat up half-way in bed, struggled to open her eyes, sank back and closed them. But presently she awoke again, sat bolt upright this time. She looked about her with a dazed expression.

Someone was screaming her name. Hester leaped to her feet, rushed into the other room.

Southward sat huddled in the middle of the bed, her black hair streaming loose, her black eyes wide, dilated, glittering.

"I'm suffocating, Hester," she panted. "I keep seeing those skyscrapers. They seem to be hemming me in. I feel landlocked. They're choking me. I shall die for air—for the sea."

Hester rushed through the apartment throwing the windows wide. They opened into tunnels of dense grey fog, dimly lighted by the muffled moons of the street lamps. They let in avalanches of the night air. It struck cold and damp on her face. She ran back to Southward.

"I feel as if I were in a dungeon," Southward cried. "I'm going crazy—I'm——"

"Stop it, Southward!" Hester ordered peremptorily. "Listen!"

Involuntarily Southward listened. Faint through the muffling fog came the blast of a foghorn; from another direction came a second, then another and another. The chorus linked in a circle. Suddenly the night surged with hoarse voices. From every point of the compass and in every accent of caution, they sounded the warning of the sea.

"You're not landlocked, Southward," Hester explained in panic-stricken phrases. "It's an island—Manhattan—water all round us—everywhere—and it's foggy—foghorns everywhere—on the rivers—both rivers—the bay—listen!"

Southward did not speak. But she listened. Gradually the panic died out of her eyes.

"All right," she said, "don't bother any more. Something's come over me lately—I—I—— My nerves aren't what they were. I guess it was half nightmare." She drew her hair over her shoulder, and rebraided it so fast that the strands flew back and forth between her racing fingers. She lay down. "All right now!" Then, "Good night, Hetter!"

CHAPTER III

THE next evening Dwight called for the two girls.

"We've been up only three hours," Southward said. "We breakfasted, lunched, and dined at one fell swoop."

"That's right," Dwight approved. "You ought to sleep as much as possible until you catch this New York pace. It will come easier after a while. You look pretty fresh, I must say, after your various dissipations."

Southward wore an evening gown of a white-figured, white Chinese silk. Simple like all of her clothes, it left a V of slim neck bare, came into the waist under a broad girdle made from a Roman sash. Her hair lay flat like coiled jet close to her head; about her neck was a necklace of onyx and gold and pearl which suspended a huge locket; on her wrist was a wide bracelet, onyx and gold and pearl. The new look in her eyes—that sense of perturbation—had left them temporarily; they glimmered with her old-time spirit and audacity. Hester looked as usual inconspicuous. Her black evening gown, though innocuous, had the grace of simplicity; it gave her a look of womanliness. Now, with her hat off, the blaze of her hair, unsubdued by its new and more becoming arrangement, was brilliant as it had never been.

"What sort of a party is this going to be?" Southward questioned on their way to the car.

"Oh, a regular New York party," Dwight responded. "It ought to be some party though, because we've invited everybody that we know who's worthy to meet you. But it's like everything that happens in New York, you take a chance. It may be a cracker-jack, and then again it may be as dull as ditch water."

"What will they do?" Southward queried further.

"Talk, smoke, eat, dance," Dwight answered briefly. "They all begin alike, but Heaven only knows how they'll end."

On their way down town to a street below Twenty-third Street, he told them about the building in which he and John lived. He said it was a perfect example of what might be the haphazard history of any New York house. Big and rather splendid, done by a famous architect, it had been originally the property of a Westerner grown rich in a day in Wall Street. Passing before

his death into other hands, it had been the scene of a tragedy which resulted in a *cause célèbre*, had become next a gambling house, then the Parish House of a wealthy and influential church. Now almost the only residential building in a community of warehouses, it had been cut roughly into apartments of various sizes. John occupied an attic. Dwight had a pair of rooms two floors below.

On the way up the three flights of stairs, Dwight pointed out the evidences of the ecclesiastical influence; empty niches, vacant recesses, carved and arched doorways, the windows that matched them. Hester listened closely; but from the instant the sound of the victrola met them on the stairway, Southward's attention left the walls and ceilings. As they went higher, bursts of talk and screams of laughter came to them borne on the current of ragtime punctuated by the popping of corks, the sizz of syphons.

John came forward to greet them, Azile Morrow on one side, Edith Hale on the other.

Groups of people who sat about the fireplace on chairs, on couches, on the floor, looked up for an instant and then went on with their talk. Three couples who were dancing in a corner paid no attention to them whatever. Azile and Edith helped the girls off with their things. John returned for them after a minute's interval, introduced them to the members of the fireside group. Southward melted at once into their number, as much a component part of it as though she had always been there. She fell naturally into conversation with a trio of men and as she talked, quite frankly but with her lightning quick glances, she surveyed the room and the people. Hester drew close to Edith Hale, all but clung to her. Her eyes glued themselves to Edith's face as though if they left that harbour of refuge, it would be to psychological shipwreck. Perhaps Edith felt that. She drew Hester a little way from the rest; she conducted her about the room, commenting on the characteristic glimpses of New York living that the windows gave. Finally she settled with her on a couch apart, proceeded to talk.

"You should have seen this room at the time of the unemployment riots last winter. John used to bring as many I. W. W.'s home as the place would hold. Sometimes there were twenty sleeping on the couches and chairs and floors—anywhere they could find a spot. John tells some awfully funny stories about them. There was one, a young fellow——"

Her gentle voice went on and on, soothing her companion's em-

barrassment until Hester could look at this face and that impersonally as though it were a picture.

The room was large, bare-looking, unpapered, plastered white on walls and ceilings with ecclesiastical archings at the four corners. For furnishings, there were three single couches (two of these had been drawn up close to the fire), a huge unpainted table of soft pine, a few chairs, all big, shabby, and comfortable. The table was covered with bottles of whiskey, brandy, and beer, syphons of soda, boxes of cigars and cigarettes. A big pine and burlap screen, apparently of home manufacture, shut off a corner. There was not a picture on the wall, nothing anywhere that could be construed as ornament, except the piles of magazines and books which had been apparently dumped from the table on the floor and one statue in coloured plaster of the Virgin, which stood in a niche in the wall. The big fire in the generous fireplace gave the room a soul, and the couches its single look of comfort. The gathering brought plenty of contrast to this ascetic whiteness, however. Many of the women were in evening dress. Sitting about on the floor they made flower-bed spots of brilliant colour.

"You see that little blond girl over there in the corner," Edith's soft listless voice was saying. "She's Angela Ade. She's a suffragette—a militant. She gives very successful street talks on suffrage and she's always going off on suffrage hikes; she's a lovely little thing, though fiery. By and by I want to call her over here."

"Street talks!" Hester said in an awed tone. "That little girl!"

"Yes," Edith answered, "that little girl. She talks from soap boxes on street corners—oh, it's just as wonderful to me, Hester, as it is to you. I simply could not do anything like that." Edith paused and skipped to another group, picking her exhibits at haphazard apparently. "The big girl—the brunette—is Ruthie Stanley. She's assistant editor on *Progress*. She's a college graduate, very able, a strong type, a little too masculine for my taste though."

Hester looked at Miss Stanley.

She was masculine if masculinity means a certain big cleanliness of featuring. And certainly her fresh crisp shirt-waist and her taut trim tailored suit presented every possible contrast to Edith's floating feminine fulnesses.

"I should not say she looked masculine exactly," Hester commented, "only responsible and efficient."

"Perhaps you're right," Edith assented. "The little bronze-

coloured girl next to her is Jane Daly. She's an actress. Isn't she a charming little thing? Don't you love her eyes? And isn't her figure adorable?"

Edith waited for no answer to her questions. She seemed to assume assent and speeded on. "She's very able and works hard. She's awfully ambitious. If she gets half a chance, she'll do something." Again ignoring the rest of the group, Edith picked apparently at random another type. "The woman on the other side of the room in the morris chair—notice her lovely fresh colour—is Jimmy Tench. She's a press agent," and at Hester's gasp, "yes, and a very able one. Somehow I always feel very insignificant beside Jimmy. She knows the world as a man does and treats it as a man does. She meets men on a basis of *camaraderie* that I very much admire in her and yet have no desire whatever to emulate. Isn't she a clean-looking vigorous type though, with that complexion, those big strong-looking teeth, those huge clear eyes? Not exactly handsome—she just escapes being handsome—but there's something awfully refreshing about Jimmy."

"Yes," Hester hazarded again, "somehow I feel less afraid of her than anybody."

"You'll like her more and more, I think. Everybody likes Jimmy. Now I'll tell you about some of the men. Many of them are reporters. Those two talking with Azile are from the *Planet*—Dwight's paper. McAndrews is one of the cleverest newspaper men in New York. He's the red-headed one. The little handsome man beside him is an illustrator, Tim Carney."

"Oh, I know his work," Hester said. There was a slight emphasis on the word "know" as of relief at finding some detail at which her mind could catch.

"He's awfully popular. The two men on the other side of the fire, talking together, are Schalberg and Van Vlagger. They're from John's forces on *Tomorrow*. You must get to know them. Schalberg has a very brilliant mind, I think. It has all the metallic hardness of the Hebraic intelligence and yet there's a kind of flame—a kind of poetry of expression—playing over his observation. Van Vlagger is a bubbling personality, much less intellectual, but very whimsical and paradoxical. Would you like me to call one of them over here?"

Hester caught her arm. "Not—not yet. And don't leave me!"

Edith smiled. "Very well. I'll stay with you all the evening. You shan't have to talk unless you want, but you'll find everybody simple and nice and full of conversation. The thing to do is to let them talk. But I don't have to tell you that. John says

you're one of the most gifted listeners he ever met. That little blond lad over there is a physician—one of John's I. W. W. friends. They call him 'the Jungle Doc.' Now—oh, here's Ripley."

"Well, Hester," Fearing asked, dropping on the couch beside her, "how is New York treating you? Let me look at you. I haven't had a chance before." He turned his melancholy hound's eyes directly on her for a moment. "It seems to me that you're looking pretty well for a girl who was ill a few weeks ago."

"I'm sure I should think that I felt better already," Hester said, "if I could think at all. But I can't think. We've only been here two days and everything is still going at such a pace that I'm excited all the time, even when I sleep. I guess I must be better though because I don't think of it."

"I think you are too," Fearing agreed. He removed his gaze from her face, but from time to time it went back. "Did you keep on dancing?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—all the fall and winter. Sometimes Southward and I would dance all alone in the garret."

"I'm glad of that," Ripley approved. "Oh, here's John, and time he welcomed me."

"Hello, Rip." John slipped into the place that on Ripley's advent Edith had vacated. "How do you feel after your various dissipations, Hester?"

"Very well," Hester answered. "I haven't had such sleep in months as last night—or this morning rather. When I went to bed, I seemed to fall straight down into a deep dark well. Southward waked me once. But I fell into the well again and I stayed there till about five this afternoon. I never slept all day before in my life."

"You'll find yourself doing that often in New York," John warned her.

"Oh, by the way, how is Hallowell?" Fearing asked.

"Very well," Hester said. "He came to see me one afternoon when I was sick and brought me one of his revolutionary Italian papers and read for my comfort—translating as he went along—a very gory account of a labour riot in Turin."

The men laughed. "Nice old boy!" exclaimed John. "I've been sending him *Tomorrow* regularly and anything else I could get of a sufficiently revolutionary character. It's interesting to think of him down there, Rip," he went on musingly, "in that dead little town, blue-blooded, steeped in centuries of New England culture, ex-sky pilot with a finger on every revolutionary movement in the world."

"Oh, yes, it's bully," agreed Fearing. "I appreciate that. And how is *The Rebellions of the Nineteenth Century* coming on?" He turned to Hester.

"It seems to be progressing," Hester answered. "He works hard all the time. Of course after you two had left, he tried more and more to convert Southward and me to his ideas. He used to bring chapters over and read them to me while I was sick. Southward only laughed—the way she always does—she doesn't care. I cared—but I was too frightened—the way I always am."

"We're going to cure you of that fright, Hester," Ripley promised.

"I hope so," Hester said, "but I'm afraid not. I fear it is too deep-rooted."

"I don't," disagreed Ripley. "Ah, excuse me!" He rose and crossed the room in answer to Jimmy Tench's beckoning finger.

"How do you think Edith looks, Hester?" John asked.

Edith was seated on the floor now, her long nearly bare arms clasped and hanging over the fulness of her dull green gown. She sat in the flare of the firelight; when it flamed it gave her skin an adventitious rose-in-bloom colour; when it died, her face turned waxy.

"I don't think she looks well," Hester said at once. "Not nearly as well as when she was in Shayneford."

"You're right," John agreed. His brow knit. For an interval, he sat regardless of Hester, his eyes fixed on Edith with the look of a man who is trying to solve a problem.

Hester slowly transferred her gaze from Edith to John. He had not changed appreciably in five months, although he had of course lost all his Shayneford tan. But at this moment, he was as far removed as possible from his usual easy self. His pose had lost its normal negligent grace. His pleasant smile had gone. He looked awkward, doubled up, his head protruded and his eyes fixed. All that inner tumult which ordinarily showed only in faint marks here and there had burst in flame into his expression. It was as though his youth were torn by furies, and torn before her eyes.

"I don't know what it is," he muttered. Then in a flash he pulled himself together, relaxed into a characteristic easy pose. His pleasant smile came back. "I'm worried about Edith, Hester. She seems to get paler and paler every day."

"I'm worried too," Hester admitted. Their eyes met in the sympathy of their common anxiety.

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Morena O'Reilly settled himself at Southward's side.

"Well, missie," he began mischievously, "we meet again. You remember I told you we would."

"Did you?" Southward's tone was languid; so was her pose. But into her figure came a certain tenseness as though, cowering against an attack, she had suddenly stiffened to meet it. "When—I don't remember——"

Morena laughed. "Oh, yes, you do. You remember perfectly." The Celt was all in the ascendant in Morena now. His deep-blue, heavily-fringed eyes sparkled and under his jetty moustache a smile, almost equally sparkling, re-enforced them. It was impossible to withstand that spirit of mischief.

Southward smiled with him and the rigidity went out of her figure.

"I'm glad you're here," Morena went on. "You are more pretty than ever and I've no doubt twice as fascinating. I'd like nothing better than to get an account of your conquests since last we met. But of course you will never give me that. Come, let's be good friends—and comrades! Will you let me show you about New York a bit?"

"Of course, Mr. O'Reilly. I shall be delighted. I may even tell you about the conquests. Who knows? If I can remember any of them." Southward continued to maintain her languor of voice, her languor of pose. Her eyes lingered non-committally on Morena's face.

That gentleman laughed abruptly. "By Jove, you're a cool one. Shake hands with me! You haven't shaken hands with me yet."

After a perceptible instant of hesitation Southward extended her hand. Morena held it a brief instant.

"What are you two shaking hands about?" Azile called from a distance. She rose and came over to where they sat. With a sudden impulse, subtle as it was sudden, she subsided into a black-and-gold heap on the floor. The firelight ran over the sequined tracteries of her gown, broke out in flame, turned her coral earrings to drops of blood. "You met last night, you know."

"Election bet, Azile," Morena said carelessly.

"How I loathe you, Morena," Azile emitted crossly. "You always lie to me and I always know it."

"We're alike in that," Morena explained pleasantly. "You always lie to me and I always lie to you. But I think you're rather unfair, Azile. I don't hate you because you lie to me. I rather like you for it."

"Well, I don't like you for it. Lying is the one thing women never forgive in men, Morena," Azile informed him.

"I suppose so," Morena said in a resigned tone. "Miss Drake looks perfectly natural here, doesn't she?" he went on fluently, changing the subject. "She belongs wherever she falls. Now Miss Crowell has every defence out and every terror."

Southward's eyes softened. "Oh, Hester'll be all right in time. Hester clings to her environment however much it frightens her. The instant she gets anywhere, she begins sending out roots, until presently she's growing there. I feel perfectly at home in new places. Sometimes they seem more natural than old places. But I don't want to stay. I don't know anything I enjoy more than tearing myself up by the roots."

Her listener smiled. "That's right!" Morena applauded. "That's fine!"

"What's right," Dwight demanded, interrupting from over Azile's shoulder, "and what's fine?"

"Miss Drake says," Morena translated freely, "that the farther from home she gets, the more at home she feels. And the better she likes a place, the sooner she wants to leave it."

"Oh, I could see she belonged," Dwight said, "the instant I met her at the Grand Central. She took possession of the city right then and there. I got her out of the station before it occurred to her to order everybody off the premises. Now what are we going to do to show the city to these captive princesses?"

"She's coming up to my place for the week-end," Azile interposed promptly, "and Hester's going with Edith. Edith and I have decided that between us. It's settled."

"Is it?" Dwight demanded from Southward.

Southward smiled. "It seems so."

"Come to dinner Sunday night—you two," Azile ordered of Dwight and Morena.

"Thanks!" Morena answered with promptness and "All right!" Dwight replied with alacrity.

"Oh, by the way, Dwight," Azile added carelessly, "I want you to take me to see that Goya. I know you'll want to sleep to-morrow morning. Can you be around Wednesday about eleven?"

"All right," Dwight answered again. But perhaps this time there was less alacrity in his tone.

"Oh—and say, Dwight," Azile went on, "I want you to go to that Sherman auction with me. It's Thursday morning. You remember you were awfully interested to see those old French

things that are coming up for sale. It's your day off. If you'll promise to get to the house by ten, I'll promise to make the effort to get up at nine."

"All right!" Dwight answered the third time. But he said this after an interval in which, biting his lip, he palpably considered the matter. He became a little *distract*. An irritated frown grooved his forehead.

"See here, I want to talk with Miss Drake for a moment," Angela Ade interrupted. "I have to be on the job everlastingly, you know. And all unknown females are fish to my net. So let me get this off my chest. Now first, do you believe in equal suffrage, Miss Drake?"

"I suppose I do. But I'm not the least bit interested in the question."

"Well, will you march in the parade in May? We need you if you can do it."

"Yes, I'll agree to that—if I'm here."

"All right. Make out this card."

Miss Ade handed Southward a yellow card and a pencil. She watched her while she wrote. "Can you make speeches on corners?" she asked.

"I could if I wanted to—but I don't," Southward answered.

"Well, can you address indoor meetings?"

"I could if I wanted to," Southward answered again, "but I don't."

"Would you sell magazines for us on the street?" Miss Ade continued with undiminished zeal.

"Yes, I'll do that."

"Hear, hear!" Jimmy Tench interrupted, kneeling at Southward's side. "Give me a show here, Angel. Miss Drake, some of my East Side girls are on strike. They need pickets. Will you help them out?"

"Sure!" Southward's eyes sparkled. "I'd love that. What is a picket and what does it do?"

Miss Tench explained. "I'll telephone you some day this week in the morning. Wait a jiff and let me take your address and telephone number."

"Now, Jimmy," Miss Ade continued, "let's go over and ask Miss Crowell."

The rest of the group in the spirit of mischief watched their onslaught on Hester, the brisk business-like attitude of the two New York women, Hester's dumb terrors, her inarticulate negations.

In the meantime, more and more people were arriving. The room had begun to fill up. There were not enough chairs to accommodate them, although chairs were brought in from other rooms. They sat around on the floor, their backs against the walls. In the centre people danced. The ragtime roar of the victrola was uninterrupted. The sizz of the soda syphons sounded constantly. The atmosphere grew thick with smoke; platters of sandwiches appeared from behind the screen, baskets of cheese; plates of pickles and olives; tins of sardines; all the treasures of the neighbouring delicatessen. Under cover of this confusion, Dwight drew Southward aside. "Say, get on your things, will you?" he asked. "I want to take you for a little walk. New York is very pretty, right round here." For a long interval now, Dwight had maintained silence, obviously irritated. At that moment his voice was querulous.

"All right," Southward agreed. She slipped surreptitiously into her hat and coat.

"First," Dwight said, "I'm going to show you *my* rooms." He led the way two flights down; unlocked a door near the back of the house.

Southward paused on the threshold an instant; threw into the room one of her sweeping comprehensive looks; burst into laughter.

"What's the idea?" Dwight demanded.

"Oh, it's so different from John's rooms," Southward declared, "as different as you two men are from each other."

Certainly none of the monastic bareness and whiteness which marked John's quarters appeared in Dwight's big living-room or the adjoining bedroom. There was plenty of colour and decoration; detail. Red predominated in rugs, curtains, and upholstery. Just as cheer seemed the object of the colour-scheme, so comfort seemed the aim of the furniture. The chairs were all big, the couch broad and piled with cushions. Everywhere, framed photographs of girls on walls and mantels, decorative hand-made litter on book-shelves and tables, were evidences of Dwight's popularity with women. A certain bold simplicity in the furniture minimised this feminine strain. Dwight lit a cigarette and smoked in silence. Southward flitted from wall to wall, looking at the pictures, examining the books; making occasional comment but asking no questions. Dwight volunteered no information.

When they came out on the street, what remained of Southward's high spirits had quite evaporated. Dwight was still moody.

They walked south, talking soberly and with long pauses, of indifferent things.

"How pretty this is!" Southward said, breaking a silence. "Park Avenue looks like Commonwealth Avenue but this looks like Beacon Street."

"Oh, yes, the neighbourhood of lower Fifth Avenue and the Square is much the most attractive part of town in my opinion," Dwight answered absently. "There, there's the Washington Arch. Isn't that pretty nice?"

But neither of them more than glanced at the Arch; for without awaiting an answer, Dwight demanded suddenly, "Have you forgotten our compact? You gave me the New York rights, you know." His voice had changed. It was querulous again.

"Oh, no," Southward replied. "I haven't forgotten."

"Well, see that you don't."

"Oh, I'll keep the compact—until it bores me," Southward's voice had become light.

"I'll take care not to bore you," Dwight promised stiffly.

"See that you don't," Southward mimicked him.

"Which reminds me," Dwight went on, "that I have certainly been bored proper this day by your friends Ely and Horne. They've been telephoning me at half-hour intervals all the afternoon. One wanted your address and the other your name. I said of course that I couldn't give them without your permission. And they besought me to get your permission. Shall I give it to them?"

"No," Southward replied promptly.

"All right." Dwight looked relieved.

"Or at least not yet," Southward mitigated her first decision.

Now they looked at the Arch; even crossed the street to make a closer examination after they had viewed it from the Avenue. Suddenly they were both very light-hearted. Standing in the Square, Dwight gave Southward a little history of the neighbourhood, pointing out various sections of interest with his stick; the row of formal houses in varying shades of rose on the north side with their deep white doorways and their beautiful vines; the more bohemian row at the south with its shops and studios; the bachelor apartments, east, where a famous novelist had laid a famous scene in a famous book; McDougal Alley to the west with its array of studios. Something unexpressed seemed to come out of their talk beside all this information and the comment on it; for they laughed gaily at anything that offered the faintest pretext for mirth and interrupted themselves constantly to talk about other things. Before they returned to the party, Dwight took

her for an abbreviated voyage of discovery about the neighbourhood. Tucking her arm in his, drawing her along at a furious pace, he poured out on her a wild medley of mingled narrative and description of what he called the "village" and the "villagers."

"By the way," Southward asked as they turned back, "tell me now about the novel."

"The novel!" Dwight said, "which one? I told you, didn't I, that the Cape Cod one—sort of petered out? I realised, when I got away from there, that what you said was true. I hadn't got under the skin of those people at all. At first that discouraged me a lot and I decided to put it aside. Then I began another. I've been working on it up at Azile's. She's been a great deal of help. I've had a lot of assignments on the East Side and I got awfully interested in the life there. An idea came to me some weeks ago and I've been working on it on and off ever since. I've read all of it to Azile and she seems enthusiastic about it. I'm inclined to trust to her judgment because, like you, she never was strong for the Cape Cod novel. I'll read it to you some time. First though I'm going to take you over to the East Side. Oh, I've got a campaign of discovery and exploration mapped out for you that will make your hair curl—you ignorant little country-girl you."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Southward and Dwight returned to John's room, it was to a party much more crowded, much more noisy, much more permeated with smoke. People were arriving all the time. The couches had been moved back against the wall, the chairs had disappeared. The dancers filled the entire room. Those who wished to sit down had retreated to the halls and stairways. There was no break between dances, as whenever the victrola threatened to run down someone inserted a new needle. When anybody thought of it the disk was changed. Dwight drew Southward into the *mélée* and they danced until their enduring powers began to call forth comment derisive and otherwise. Even their extraordinary strength and spirit were not proof against the violence of the exercise and the heaviness of the air; finally as though by mutual consent they came to a standstill. Dwight got some ginger ale for Southward and some whiskey and soda for himself. They retired to the stairs, but they were not allowed to remain there long. Azile and Morena hunted them up presently. Morena claimed a dance from Southward and Dwight whirled away with Azile.

"Where did you disappear to?" Morena asked idly.

"Oh, Dwight took me about for a little walk," Southward answered with equal carelessness. "He wanted to show me this neighbourhood."

"It's a pleasant neighbourhood," Morena commented. "Everybody will tell you that it's more like Paris than any part of New York, and really it's the only place in New York that has anything like an art atmosphere."

"Yes. Dwight told me a little of that."

"There are lots of interesting places in New York that I want to show you," Morena went on, "picturesque, foreign aspects less obviously interesting perhaps. Sometimes I think it takes a man who has lived so much abroad as myself to appreciate all that. You know for instance that New York is the third largest Italian city in the world?"

"I didn't know that," Southward declared. "But I am interested to hear it."

"Yes. Only Naples and Milan are bigger than New York's Little Italy. There's a Little Italy uptown and a Little Italy downtown. I want to show them both to you. Then there's always the East Side, an amusing little Chinatown and a German quarter; even a Syrian quarter. I'll take you to them all if you'd like."

"I *should* like," Southward said with what was for her an accent of graciousness. "Thank you very much. By the way what's become of Hester? And what has she been doing all this time?"

"I think she's having a good time," Morena replied. "She's been dancing. Then she and Edith went upstairs on the roof to look at the city. I think they're together somewhere now."

Edith and Hester were sitting together on one of the couches, partially protected by a screen. All the evening Edith had hovered in Hester's vicinity. Whenever a man approached, she introduced him to Hester and then with her usual kindness carried on the conversation single-handed, gradually though, by comment or by indirect appeal, drawing Hester into the discussion. As soon as she had overcome Hester's shyness completely, she disappeared, always coming to the rescue however when the tête-à-tête threatened to break.

"Who are those people who have just come in, Edith?" Hester had just asked. "Some of the girls have short hair. How queer-looking they are!" she added slowly and then with a burst, "Why, they're beautiful!"

"They're some of the villagers," Edith answered. And then at Hester's look of perplexity, "You must have heard us speak of Greenwich Village—the Latin quarter of New York?"

"Oh, yes—many times," Hester said. "John says Greenwich Village is the only place in New York where people dress as they like, work as they like, live as they like, and love as they like."

"They certainly love as they like," Edith said, laughing, "and occasionally that means loving quite frequently and sometimes several people at once."

"And do they all wear short hair?" Hester went on.

"No, Country Girl," Edith responded, "not all. Mainly those to whom it is becoming as everywhere else. Isn't that little one in brown cunning?"

"Yes," Hester said. "I've been looking at her. It seems to me I've never seen anybody so little and so perfect. She's all one colour, isn't she—golden hair, golden skin, golden eyes?"

"They call her the Golden Girl," Edith explained. "She's a model. The tall thin colourless woman in grey, Miss Ainsworth,

has used her again and again for a series of what she calls 'Peacock Studies' in which she is always dressed in peacock's plumes. The contrast of her nude golden skin and the green and the blue of the peacock eyes is really quite marvellous. I'll take you to see the Peacock Studies some day." Edith waited a minute, then she added in a casual tone, "Miss Ainsworth lives with that young man, the tall slender blond. His name is Loftus."

"*Lives* with him!" Hester said in a shocked tone. "You mean they aren't married." And at Edith's nod, "Does everybody know it?"

"It's everybody's own fault if they don't," Edith responded. "Miss Ainsworth tells everybody. And they're a very hospitable couple—they give parties all the time."

"Why don't they marry?" Hester asked in a breathless tone.

"They say they don't want to marry," Edith answered.

"How very—very——" Hester seemed to have difficulty in finding words; she ended lamely with, "strange."

"The crowd that has just come in," Edith went on fluently, as though giving Hester time to recover from the mental bewilderment into which she had plunged, "is a very delightful one; they're all young, all gay, most of them beautiful, and some of them gifted. The tall blond girl with the wonderful Greek face, the one in profile now—doesn't she look more like a youth than a girl—is a painter. One spring the villagers got up a marvellous pageant and she was Diana. I wish you could have seen her in a drapery of pink gauze with a crescent in that wonderful hair, a silver bow and arrow and a great greyhound at her side. Do you see the slim dark girl beside her with the huge soft black eyes? When she turns, try to get her profile; the boldness of it is magnificent, I think. She's a dancer. You'll find her the most beautiful dancer in the room, but curiously enough I prefer to watch her when she walks and talks. She is so graceful then that it almost hurts. She was Cleopatra——"

"Cleopatra," Hester echoed, but it was apparent that her mind was not on its concept of Cleopatra, that it was straying along other fields. She roused herself with a perceptible effort. "Cleopatra, I can't imagine her being Cleopatra."

"She wasn't the usual idea of Cleopatra," Edith elucidated, "but she was wonderful. Nothing of the conventional houri or odalisque. No floating transparent draperies and tiger skin. No jewelled bracelets and anklets. She wore a strange close gown, with Egyptian figures on it that bound her figure almost like a mummy's and a high broad flat Egyptian headpiece. With those

huge eyes of hers and that clear colourless skin, her lips painted a deep purple red and her long slim bare arms—oh, she was marvellous.”

“Is she an Egyptian?” Hester asked timidly.

“She is from Cambridge, Mass., the daughter of a professor. The third girl,” Edith went on, “is a poet.”

“She is magnificent,” Hester commented.

“Yes, I think she is,” Edith agreed. “She’s an American like all the rest of them—but she’s perfectly my idea of an Arabian. That extraordinary carriage, spirited, proud, those enormous eyes like lakes of burning jet, and that strange grey-olive skin.”

“She gives you such an impression,” Hester continued, “of—of—untamableness.”

“Exactly,” Edith coincided, “she makes me think of a high-bred Arabian mare. I have a feeling that if I put my hand on her bare skin I’d feel all the nerves quivering underneath. I have seen her after a dance was over at four o’clock in the morning burst away from the group and run down the street like a deer.”

“Oh, I would like to see somebody do a thing like that!” Hester said. There was almost a note of awe in her voice. “I don’t believe I could run if anybody was looking at me.”

“She was the Queen of Sheba in the pageant,” Edith went on, “and she was wonderful. I say ‘*wonderful*’ and ‘*marvellous*’ and ‘*beautiful*’ over and over again because those are the only words that describe the pageant. She wore a gown of cloth of gold; on her head was an enormous head-dress of peacocks’ plumes and from them hung a deep glittering fringe of mock diamonds. She was a combination of sumptuousness and a kind of gorgeous wildness that is almost impossible to describe.”

“I would like to have seen her,” Hester said simply. And now that mental bewilderment seemed to precipitate in concrete question. “But about those two who are living together, that Miss Ainsworth and that Mr. Loftus, are there many who do that?”

Edith laughed. “Well, that’s rather a difficult question to answer. Of course there are all kinds of classes of what is called the free union in New York. There are here, of course, as everywhere, numbers of women who live with men for gain. They are frankly mercenary—immoral if you please. That is to say they *must* live, but they want to live at the least possible trouble to themselves, and so they capitalise their attractions. Then of course there are many others who have no moral scruples—pirate-ships, social derelicts—who frankly do the easiest thing in the love game, unmoral not immoral, if you please. Then there are

others who don't believe in the marriage ceremony at all, who are living in a so-called illicit relation for a principle—free lovers, reformers—if you please. You remember that tall dark Miss Collingwood to whom I introduced you just a little while ago?"

"Yes," Hester assented. "She's sitting over there beside John."

"That's the one," Edith said. "She does not believe in the marriage ceremony. She is living with that lame elderly man, Joe Hendrickan. He's talking over in the corner—the one with the glasses, the rather fine sensitive profile. She has lived with him for several years."

"And everybody knows it?" Hester gasped.

"Yes, and she knows everybody knows it," Edith answered.

"And she doesn't mind their knowing?"

"If she thinks they don't know," Edith declared, "she takes great pains to tell them sometime during her first conversation with them."

"I—I never heard anything like this," Hester said. "It seems so strange—so upsetting. Of course I've always known—— But I never thought—— What about their children?" she inquired with a sudden articulate luminousness.

"Ah, that's the crux of the situation," Edith explained. "There are very few children in the free-love circles. Consciously or subconsciously most of them seem to feel, that although they are willing to bear the brunt of a social campaign, they hate to inflict its penalties on their young. They seem to feel that they must make the choice between parenthood and what they consider the best type of citizenship."

"Yes. I should think it would be that way," Hester decided after a long interval of quiet.

"Do you want to go home, Hester?" Southward asked, appearing around the edge of the screen.

"Oh, no," Hester said, "not till the party's over."

"Even if it keeps up until sunrise?" Southward pressed her.

"Not even if it keeps up until to-morrow night," Hester announced firmly.

"She is a sport, isn't she?" Southward commented, turning to Dwight who accompanied her.

"One of our best little stayers," Dwight answered promptly.

"But, Hester dear," Southward went on, and that look of tenderness which came into her face often when she addressed Hester for a moment dimmed its look of sparkling *insouciance*, "don't be too much of a sport, don't let yourself get too tired. Don't stay here just because you think you're taking me away. I'm ready to

go at any time." Then at Hester's quick nod of dissent, "Of course I know you'd never consent to that. But John will take you home, if you really want to go."

"I don't want to go home," Hester said with an unexpected lucidity. "I do want to stay. I am not tired. But if I were tired, I should still stay here until I dropped, because for the first time in my life I am seeing something strange and modern, and breath-taking and dazzling. I want to get enough of it to last me all the rest of the long grey years in Shayneford."

"Bravo, Hester!" Dwight threw approvingly at her as he drew Southward back into the whirl of dancers.

"What is Dwight bravoing for?" asked John, who came up in time to hear this farewell salute.

Edith answered for Hester. "It's only Hester saying that she's perfectly willing to stay out the rest of the week at this party."

"I applaud those sentiments," John exclaimed. "I think it's a very nice party. But you mustn't get so tired to-night that you won't be able to go with me on a little expedition day after to-morrow." He turned explainingly to Edith. "I want to show Hester that view from the ferry at night. I'm so sorry you're going to be away, Edith. You ought to go too. However, you'll be back in time for plenty other excursions."

Edith's smile fixed a little. "It is too bad," she said. "But as you say I'll be back soon."

"Oh, are you going away, Edith?" Hester's voice was almost a wail. "It frightens me to think of being in New York without you here. It makes me homesick to think of it."

Edith's smile lost its fixed quality. "I hate to go too," she said, "it's an old aunt that's ill—who's dying slowly. It keeps taking me away. But I'll be back and then we'll run round the city together. I'll show you *my* New York, which is, I assure you, very different from Azile's New York or John's or Dwight's or Morena's."

The party did not last as late as the next night which Hester had placed as her limit of staying, but it kept up long after the sunrise which Southward had tentatively put as its conclusion. Till two o'clock, there seemed to be no diminution in the crowd of dancers. But after two they melted away until circulation was much freer; those who were left seemed to go at it with new zest. By four o'clock, they were tired of dancing and had taken to "stunts." Songs, recitations, solo dancing of every kind and description, and finally parlor acrobatic feats of every known

power and variety followed one after another. At six they were, as compared to their original numbers, but a handful; that handful though, the youngest and gayest. They resumed dancing for a while. At seven they went to a Childs' restaurant near by and ate ravenously of ham and eggs, steak, sausages, coffee—anything that the bill of fare afforded. After breakfast they repaired to the studio of the Golden Girl; there with the aid of more cigarettes and more drinks, they sat round on the floor telling stories, swapping experiences until their hostess fell asleep. It was some time after noon when Southward and Hester got home and fell, exhausted but jubilant, into their beds. It was nine o'clock the next morning before they opened their eyes.

CHAPTER V

AZILE, in a complicated negligée of rose-pink and tea-coloured lace, mob cap of silver trimmed with roses, stood within when the maid opened the door to Southward's ring.

"Oh, here you are!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad. Wait a moment," she called to the driver of the taxi.

"It was awfully good of you to send a taxi for me," Southward said, "but very foolish. I walk everywhere, you know, and I have a natural sense of direction. It's the only way to get to know a new city."

"You're right," Azile approved, "but I never walk anywhere if I can help it. I hate walking. And somehow I always take it for granted that other people feel the way I do. One reason, of course, is my high heels. I just about live in taxis. You get the habit in Paris, where they are so much cheaper. I'll go without anything else except clothes to have all the taxis I want."

"They're great fun, of course," Southward agreed, but without enthusiasm.

"Let me take you through the shop first," Azile offered. "Mother's busy with some stuff that's just arrived. You'll find it very amusing, I know."

The Morrows' place consisted of two of the little old-time stables that so agreeably diversify New York's mid-Victorian brownness. Broad stone flags led up to their wide doors; green-grey slates covered their gabled roofs. One was shop, the other house. They were connected by means of a single door. Southward followed Azile's pink bedroom slippers into a dusty dusky interior crowded with the heterogeneous collection of the antique-shop. Haphazard on the walls hung old mirrors, engravings, pictures, silhouettes, samplers, tapestries. On the sideboards crowded old glass of all shapes, colours, and thicknesses. Over chairs sprawled spreads, chintz hangings. On the tables piled pewter, brass, candlesticks, lamps, Sheffield plate, old china. A showcase at one side held a collection of old jewelry. Another, opposite, was crammed with old silver, all very much in need of shining. In the midst of this confusion, neat, prim, ordered,

a big apron covering her black gown, Mrs. Morrow was superintending the removal of a bureau. She stopped to shake hands with Southward.

"Good Lord, that's Gert Beebee's bureau!" Southward exclaimed. "Doesn't it look beautiful?"

"Yes, I'm pleased with it," Mrs. Morrow said with satisfaction. "I have a man here who's an artist—a poet almost. He gets the exact degree of polish on everything. I've just sold that bureau for seventy-five dollars."

"Really," Southward exclaimed. "I had no idea that old furniture brought such prices."

"Doesn't it tempt you to part with some of your superfluities?" Mrs. Morrow smiled her hard bright smile. But her look was of one who did not expect assent.

"Not yet," Southward answered briefly. "I'd like to see that man of yours at work sometime though."

"Come now!" Azile ordered. "He's doing something over this minute."

She led the way into a tiny workshop at the back. A little man, scraping a sideboard with a rectangle of steel, straightened up as they entered.

"Mr. Courvoisier," Azile said, "here is a lady who has a house full of the most sumptuous old furniture you ever saw."

Mr. Courvoisier bowed. "Zat means nossing," he said. He had a delicate small-featured face in which a pair of big black eyes sparkled from the midst of long iron-grey hair and a long iron-grey beard. "Do you loaf it?"

"Enough not to give it up, though I'm poor," Southward explained briefly.

"Zat is enough," Mr. Courvoisier approved. "Nevaire give it up."

Southward asked questions about his work. He answered with enthusiasm, volunteered detailed accounts of processes. Azile began to fidget.

"Come, come!" she ejaculated after a while. "You've got ages to learn about finishing furniture. Let's get back into the house. I want to talk with you."

She led the way into the other stable. With its bare polished floor, its big rugs, its few pieces of old furniture, its many flowers, it presented an atmosphere of fresh simplicity which contrasted sharply with the disorder of the shop. A stairway from the lower big room led to a mezzanine gallery, where there were four small chambers. "This is mother's," Azile said of the first

in passing. "This is mine. Here is where Dwight does his writing. This is the guest-chamber."

It was very simple, the guest-chamber, and like the other rooms, furnished in old stuff. A tall glass on the little snake-foot mahogany candle-stand held a single rose. A pair of silhouettes hung over the desk. A sampler, gold-framed, hung over the bed. An old mirror with a picture of a ship at the top hung over the bureau.

"Goodness!" Southward exclaimed, "I should think I was back on the Cape. It gives me a faint homesick feeling."

Azile laughed. "Mother said it would. She furnished this all up to-day especially for you. She has a great trick of changing the room over, according to the character of our guests. Mother has a feeling for old things—a kind of tenderness. I sometimes tell her that she'd sell me for a good Hepplewhite chair. Now is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, thanks," Southward answered. "While I'm here though, perhaps I'd better get into my other dress."

"Shall I go?" Azile offered politely.

"Oh, no. Stay if you like," Southward responded indifferently.

Azile dropped into the little slat-backed rocker. Without seeming to do so, she watched Southward remove her belongings from her bag—a comb and brush and mirror, all very plain in white celluloid, a nightgown, equally plain of a fine white nainsook, a kimono even plainer of pongee, a pair of bedroom slippers of white fur. She watched her get into her simple white evening dress. "You're just like a boy, aren't you?" Azile said.

Southward smiled an indifferent assent. "A little," she replied.

"Now come to my room," Azile commanded. "And be prepared for a shock. It's all modern. Not for me any old stuff. Furniture can't be too light and airy and convenient and above all things, *clean* for me."

Azile's bedroom set was indeed modern; of a delicate light wood, augmented with cane, painted with Dresden-like motifs of pink roses and blue ribbons. A huge triptych mirror hung over the generous dresser. A long mirror hung between the windows. And wherever among the pictures and hangings a space permitted, a mirror, short and broad or narrow and long, filled it. Southward looked about and suddenly the blue-and-black shimmer came into her eyes.

"You're certainly not like a boy," she commented. "Not that I haven't plenty of mirrors in the garret. I only use one of them, though."

"I need every one of mine," Azile asserted. She opened the

closet-door of which the inside was one huge looking-glass. "I put my dress onto this. I make up at the three-part one. My hat goes on before the square one. One side of my profile submits to inspection over there; the other side over here. The rest are used according to whether it's daylight or electric light. This collection of hand-mirrors helps in various ways." She pointed to the big broad dresser, overloaded with implements of the toilet in gold and green enamel.

"I hope you manage to make out," Southward said. Her smile had broken through the non-committal impassivity in which she had entered the house.

"I do, thank you," Azile responded. "Now come to Dwight's room. I want to show you where he works."

Dwight's room was distinctly a man's room, a big roll-top desk, a big table, a chair or two, a plain white-painted iron bed. The desk and table were covered with papers. Azile began to divide these into piles.

"He's awfully disorderly," she said in the tone of amused indulgence with which women commonly refer to this failing in men. "I straighten out his papers every day or he'd never find anything. Have you seen the East Side novel yet?" She asked this carelessly, bending to pick up a page of manuscript which she had dropped on the floor.

"No," Southward answered.

"It's pretty good," Azile explained. "You know I didn't like the Cape Cod novel."

"No?" Southward answered.

"No. It didn't convince me. It was a reporter's account of a romance—not a novelist's. It didn't smack of the country. Did you read it?"

"Yes," Southward answered.

"What did you think of it?"

"About as you do."

"I think you'll like the East Side story. Perhaps he'll read us some of it to-night. I haven't heard the last two or three chapters yet. Still I don't know that he'll want to do that with Morena here."

Southward was silent.

"Don't you think that his work is very interesting?" Azile went on.

Southward hesitated. "I haven't made up my mind that Mr. Cameron is a novelist yet," she said at last.

"Not a novelist. My *dear*, have you read *Ginger*?"

"Yes. I liked that. But *Ginger* strikes me as one of the accidental books that anybody might throw off who's got the merest instinct to write. Almost anybody can write one book. I wrote one once. A short one in college."

"What was it about?" Azile asked, amazed.

"It was a pirate story—all men—no women in it. I couldn't write about a woman to save my life. I laid the scene in Shayneford in the early days. I used our family history."

"What became of it?" Azile asked, still amazed.

"Oh, I burnt it. Of course it was bad, but it wasn't so awfully bad. My English instructor at college wanted to let me let him submit it to a publisher. He offered to make suggestions about amplifying it. But I didn't. It only illustrates what I was saying, that there's one novel in everybody. One novel doesn't make a writer any more than one swallow makes a summer."

Azile stared at her. And in her eyes struggled many expressions: surprise, perplexity, active indignation, a certain grudging respect. "Why didn't you submit it to a publisher?" she asked finally.

"I was afraid he might accept it. I didn't want to be a writer."

"You haven't much respect for literature—or the arts in general?" Azile's interrogative tone had an acid quality.

"No, they bore me. I hate to see men working at the arts—painters, writers, sculptors, singers, actors. Not that I've known so many. But a few have drifted to Shayneford. I can't quite think of them as men. It seems to me that that sort of thing is a woman's job."

"What do you like?" There was a faint emphasis on the word "do," but Azile's tone had subdued considerably.

"Machinery."

"*Machinery!*" Azile repeated.

"I'd like to run a locomotive," Southward said. "I'd like to build bridges. Most of all I'd like to be an aviator."

"An aviator! Good God!" exclaimed Azile Morrow. "There, there's the telephone," she said in another moment and in a different voice. "We'd better go back to my room."

Ahead of Southward, Azile speeded lightly through the balcony, took up the receiver. "Hello, hello. Yes, this is Mrs. Morrow. Oh, *you!* Good morning. Yes, thanks, quite recovered. Yes! Yes! she's here now. All right." She turned. "It's Dwight, Miss Drake. He wants to talk with you." She handed Southward the receiver.

"Hello," Southward said.

"Hello," came Dwight's answering voice. "How are you?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Not tired out?"

"By no means."

"I'm coming up immediately. Tell Azile, please."

"All right."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"He says he's coming up immediately," Southward turned to Azile.

"Heavens, then I must get dressed."

Chattering briskly all the time, Azile proceeded with her dressing. It was a long and leisurely process, involving the use of many of the glittering instruments on her toilet-table, the drawing over underwear delicate as a cobweb, a gown almost as filmy of green and gold. She was interrupted ceaselessly: many times by telephone calls, three times by the arrival of florists' boxes, twice by telegrams, once by a heavy pile of mail. She ignored the telephone calls, opened the boxes, glanced at the cards that came with them and without comment dropped them into the waste-basket, arranged a charming combination of the orchids that came in one and the daffodils in another, ordered the long-stemmed bunch of American Beauties that emerged from a third to be got rid of "anywhere" with a careless, "I will not have roses about; I hate them," ran rapidly over the envelopes of her mail, opened two and dumped the rest untouched into a drawer of her desk. The telegrams alone received her undivided attention. Before she had finished, both Dwight and Morena were waiting downstairs.

"What's the taxi doing outside?" Dwight asked as he shook hands.

"*Lordee!*" Azile exclaimed with smiling indifference. "I forgot to dismiss the taxi that I sent for Miss Drake. Get my pocket-book, Netty!" she ordered the maid, "and go out and pay him."

"You extravagant wench!" Dwight commented.

Azile sighed, but she smiled too. "I'm always doing that," she admitted. "In Vienna once, I kept one waiting all night."

Dinner was a gay ceremony. Mrs. Boardman in a gown of black and white, which, evening gown though it was, managed to preserve the effect typical to her clothes of being a uniform, presided at the head of the table. Azile ministered at the foot. Azile led the conversation. At times it came into the scope of Southward's comprehension, but often it concerned itself with New York people and interests. It gave little picturesque glimpses of parties and

personalities, glittering hints of gossip and scandal. Dwight was discursive and humorous; Morena witty and epigrammatic; Azile herself gay and audacious. Mrs. Boardman and Southward were perforce silent; but Southward listened with a polite interest that perhaps veiled a real interest.

"Oh, Dwight," Azile exclaimed as they rose from the table. "Vera Petroff called me up to-day. She wants me to go there to dinner Monday. She asked me particularly if I wouldn't bring you. She's brought you an ikon from Russia."

"That's kind of her," Dwight said. "Yes, I'll go," he added. "Monday did you say?"

"Yes, Monday."

"Oh, and the Taylor-Lennalian outfit want us to go motoring with them Sunday. They want you to see their place at Fort Washington. It's to be an all-day affair. Can you go?"

"Yes, I think I can," Dwight decided. But he said it rather slowly.

"Oh, and something else—— Now, what was it? Oh, yes, I know, Tom and Jerry want us to come out to their camp for a week-end. They said they'd let you set the date. How about it? Sunday after next?"

Perceptibly Dwight hesitated. "I'll have to think that over. I'm a little involved with engagements now. I'll call them up sometime."

Southward and Morena listened, without comment of course, to this dialogue. "Will you let me take you to dinner Monday, Miss Drake?" Morena asked as they arose from the table.

"Thank you, yes," Southward answered without hesitation.

After dinner, the four went to the theatre. After the theatre they went to supper and then to one of the public dance halls where they danced until two. On Sunday they had breakfast with Azile at twelve. Mrs. Boardman, having arisen at her regular hour, did not appear at the table. But Azile presided with a charming grace behind a coffee service of Sheffield plate. She wore another astonishing demi-negligée, this of pale blue with a cap of gold. She was exceedingly vivacious, full of life and good spirits. Once a quick duck of her head in the wake of a dropped napkin shed this cap and her hair, curling at the edges, fell in soft green-gold cascades over her face. She shook it back; but she did not resume her cap.

The afternoon was for some reason or other, dull. Dwight did not seem to be talkative, although Azile rallied him constantly on the score of his low spirits. Southward was silent except when

Azile made appeal for help; then always she laughed a careless negative. Morena, all Latin, seemed to be watching the rest of the party as though it were a play. At three Azile insisted that Dwight should write for two hours. She made a pretty pretence of compelling him to this by main force. She pulled him up out of his chair, pushed him with her hands on his shoulders up the stairs and into his room, shut the door and turned the key in the lock. Afterwards she disappeared into her own room. Morena and Southward talked alone downstairs. When, within less than the prescribed two hours, Dwight emerged from his room, he was silent and moody. Morena made one or two attempts to draw him into his talk with Southward, but he did not respond. Dinner, with the help of the wine and cocktails, was for a brief interval a gay affair. Azile in another extraordinary evening gown of lilac and pearl shone again. Once she said carelessly, "Oh, Dwight, I looked over the last three chapters before I went to sleep. I want to talk them over with you sometime."

"Thanks," Dwight answered. "It's very good of you."

"Before you leave to-night, perhaps," Azile murmured with the effect of one who is trying to be heard by only one.

At half-past nine Southward rose to go.

"May I see you home?" Morena murmured.

"Thank you. It's not necessary. I'm not at all afraid," Southward answered.

Nevertheless Morena drew on his coat.

"Oh, wait a moment!" Azile exclaimed. "Just one thing before you go." She dashed out of the room and flashed swiftly downstairs. When she came back, she held a little pitcher in her hand. "This is a souvenir of your first visit to me, Miss Drake. It's such a darling piece of Lowestoft; it really belongs with your collection."

"Oh, thank you very much," Southward said formally. "It's a beautiful piece. The helmet shape, isn't it?"

"I'm glad you like it." Azile emitted many comments about Lowestoft in general as she proceeded to wrap the pitcher in tissue paper and to tie it with nursery ribbon.

Southward chattered briskly to Morena all the way to the apartment. "Will you come up?" she asked when they reached the doorway.

"Thank you, no," Morena said decisively. "Remember me to Miss Crowell. I'll call for you to-morrow at about half-past six."

"All right," Southward agreed.

"I'm going to take you down to Chinatown. I haven't been

there for three months. Not since your friend Lysander Manning was here."

"Has Lysander been in New York?" Southward asked in a tone electric with surprise.

"Yes. He came here for about a week in November. Azile made him stay at their place. She gave him a wonderful time. One night we all went to dinner in Chinatown and afterwards to the Chinese theatre. Didn't he mention it to you?"

"No," Southward said carelessly, "but I haven't seen much of Lysander this winter. He's been away a lot. As usual he's taken a road-job, travelling for some razor people, I believe. You won't come up?"

"No, thank you. Good night."

"Good night."

Southward mounted the stairs slowly. As she entered the building, all the superficial gaiety in her face dropped out of it as completely as though it had been drained from the back. Her look grew blacker and blacker; the deep scowl which always gave her a predatory quality drew its sinister furrows in her brow. Her eyes half closed. Her upper teeth sank so deep in her lower lip that they made tiny white dents in its raspberry bloom. When she entered the dark little apartment to which Hester had not as yet returned, she did not light the gas; she did not even take off her things. She moved over to the window in the kitchen and stared out. There was no moon, only a great glittering meadow of stars in the frosty night sky. The lighted windows surrounding the hollow square at the back looked as though they were painted in luminous gold paint on the dark wall. But it was evident that Southward observed none of this. Although she stared fixedly, she saw nothing. Suddenly with a jerk of her left hand the window flew up. Her right arm described an arc through the air. Immediately below sounded a crash as the Lowestoft pitcher smashed on the pavement.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN and Ripley called late Saturday afternoon to take Hester to Edith's. The trio walked over to the Avenue, climbed to the top of the bus and rode up to Fifty-ninth Street. The bus, curiously expert in spite of its cumbrous green armour, picked a deft path through the shiny social traffic of that busy hour. On each side, a line of opalescent lights sifted a magic haze over the scene. The two men did all the talking. Hester, sitting next to the rail, did not even listen: she drank down the spectacle.

"Still dazed, Hester?" John asked as they got off.

"Yes, a little," Hester answered, "but not so much as I was. I can't talk about it yet though. And I've forgotten how to think."

"Don't talk," Ripley advised. "And don't think. Let it just flow over you. Gradually it will sink in. You'll find yourself after a while."

They were moving east. Presently they entered an apartment-house; tall and slim, of white marble, its balconies filled with dwarf evergreen trees. Inside, John spoke to a man at a desk. Their names were telephoned upwards. Edith's message to come up was telephoned downwards. They entered an elevator like a miniature boudoir, manned by a boy in a fleckless green-and-gold uniform. They whizzed soundlessly to the sixteenth floor. Edith was standing in an open doorway, waiting for them.

"Oh, this is so nice," she said happily, "to have you all here and to have you all come at once."

She led the way into a big living-room. Before Hester could glance about, she conducted her to the windows which filled one end of the room and then to those that filled the other. North, they overlooked the park, a jumble of leafless trees and bushes, springing from the frost glitter of the snow; leaden toy ponds covered with the black toy figures of skaters and arched by toy bridges.

"What do you think of that, Country Girl?" Edith asked in gentle triumph. "Isn't that beautiful?"

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" Hester repeated Edith's adjective. "It looks like a Japanese print, doesn't it?"

The south windows looked back on the city—an irregular mass of buildings; red-brick, grey granite, white marble, from which leaped steeples of all proportions and decorations, chimneys of all sizes and heights, windows in which were already beginning to gleam lights of all colours and glitters.

“Isn’t that wonderful too, Country-Girl?” Edith demanded again. “Isn’t that wonderful?”

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” Hester repeated her adjective again.

“It will be more wonderful later when all the lights come out, and the stars.”

The rooms themselves were beautiful, the last cry in modernism, but too crowded perhaps with pictures and bric-à-brac; although all of these were harmonious, many beautiful and some rare. The furniture was simple but ample and luxuriously comfortable. Dark chintzes brought to the mass of warm detail the coolness of harmony; brilliant flowers brought to it the piquancy of discord. Books and magazines gave the needed touch of use.

“Now come into my dining-room,” Edith said, “I want to show you my new treasure.”

The dining-room against a background of paper like white plush displayed a collection of pewter. A small sideboard at one end was covered with old Wedgewood, its twin at the other end with old glass. Edith took from one of them a Wedgewood pitcher of mauve. Her long-fingered, beautiful hands closed about it as with a caress.

“Isn’t that an angel, Hester?” she asked. A gentle triumph gleamed in her big soft eyes as she held it up to them.

“Yes, it’s a very beautiful colour,” Hester agreed, “and I like Wedgewood very much.”

“Oh, I forgot,” Edith wailed. “You don’t like *things* either. Of course John and Ripley don’t, but I thought for a moment that you, being a woman, would.”

“Oh, I admire beautiful things,” Hester exclaimed with fervour, “but I’ve made myself not want to possess them.”

“Well, I *love* things,” Edith asserted, “and I like to possess them. I always have. I always shall. And collections such as mine—pewter, glass, Wedgewood—give one a new interest in life. It’s like hunting.”

“Do you really care for them after you get them, Edith?” John asked. “With me, you know, it’s ‘not the quarry but the chase, not the laurel but the race, not the hazard but the play——’”

"‘Make me, Lord, enjoy alway!’" Ripley ended for him *sotto voce*.

"Yes, I like them just as much after I get them," Edith insisted staunchly. "My treasures never grow stale to me. I take pleasure in them whenever I look at them. I can't understand the kind of mind that doesn't enjoy beauty." She stared reproachfully at the two men.

"Oh, I enjoy beauty enough," Ripley defended himself. "In fact it represents a special temptation to me. But somehow in this day and age there are so many more important matters than the cultivation of mere beauty. It's so easy to lose yourself in things. I won't let myself get caught in the beauty trap."

"And you, John?" Hester asked. She transferred her gaze from the Wedgewood vase gleaming soft like amethyst velvet in Edith's snowy hands to John's face.

"The last time I went through the galleries of Europe," John answered slowly, "I felt a kind of disgust with the accumulated lumber of the ages, a kind of loathing for that dead bric-à-brac. It came to me that all that art and all the talk about it and all the influence it carries might be just as great an obstacle to the advance of ideas as too many possessions to growth in the individual life. Sometimes I think that the best thing that can happen to the world at this moment would be to burn every picture, to smash every piece of sculpture, in short to destroy every beautiful thing that has passed out of actual use. So many good minds and characters and abilities would in that case be brought back to important matters. And I don't know but what it would be a good thing for creative artists. They could start fair for the first time since art began—unhampered by tradition—free!"

"John," Edith's voice thrilled with horror. "Could you destroy Botticelli's *Spring*?"

"In a flash," John answered, "if I could destroy all the other pictures with it."

"The vandals," Edith appealed to Hester, "they scare me to death."

"They frighten me," Hester admitted.

"Well, come back into the living-room," Edith suggested, "and talk about comfy things."

They talked first and then dined; dined off a table that was one huge correlated lustre of brilliant old silver, dark old mahogany, delicate old glass, and frail old china. Afterwards

they returned to the living-room; Edith drew two small couches up to the fire. John and Hester sat on one, Edith and Ripley on the other.

"You look better already, Hester," Edith said, "more rested, a little pinker—I might even say a little plumper."

"I think so too," John agreed, turning to survey Hester.

"I like that new way of doing your hair, Hester," Ripley added.

"I am glad," Hester said. And strangely enough she was not embarrassed. She addressed herself to John. "You see, I told Southward that I wanted to do my hair a different way. And while we were in Boston, she took me to a hair-dresser, and told her to try her hand at it. Why, those two experimented with me for at least an hour. They tried all kinds of ways, and how they talked! I wish you could have heard Southward argue with that woman; finally they decided to braid it in two braids like this and bind it round my head. It's an old fashioned way; curiously enough I have a picture of my mother with her hair done exactly like it. Mother had wonderful hair—it still comes to her knees. Hers was pinned in front with a silver pin, a bow and arrow. I asked mother once what became of that pin, and she told me she gave it to a young man whom she refused to marry. I'd love to have one just like it."

"Hester, if I design a bow and arrow pin and have it made for you, will you wear it?" Edith asked.

"I'd love it." Hester said this obviously as the result of a sudden resolution, after a palpable first impulse to refuse.

"All right, I'll do that. And now, please let me take your hair down, the way we did that first night at the camp. It looked so lovely hanging in braids. Will you?"

"Yes," Hester replied. And again her assent came palpably after a first impulse to refuse. But she was not embarrassed. Very gently Edith pulled the pins out. The two heavy braids slid down over the white liberty scarf that Hester wore with her black evening gown, shimmered in the firelight like carved coils of gold.

Edith returned to her place and from that vantage surveyed her work. "She is certainly Cordelia," she commented, then, "You two make a splendid composition as you sit there. Rip, I wish you had the camera here."

"I do too," Ripley said. "John's face all light and shadow, Hester's in the double glare of the firelight and her own hair."

They talked until midnight. Edith drew the two men out, John about his I. W. W. activities, Ripley in regard to the

Negro Woman. John was in a responsive mood; he went into minute detail in regard to his eccentric personal theories. Ripley combated him on some points, agreed with him on others, asked searching questions. Hester was as usual silent, listening intently. Edith occasionally dropped a comment, but always her eyes kept on the picture she had admired—John and Hester in the fire-light. Her sweet melancholy smile kept forming on her lips, kept drifting away. Once Hester changed her position. The white scarf fell off her shoulder. Still talking and without looking, John's hand went up involuntarily and adjusted it. Edith's smile fixed for an instant.

"Why is it, Hester," Edith asked later, after the men had gone, and she had conducted Hester to her bedroom, "that I like *things* so?"

"I suppose because you have never found your proper work," Hester answered immediately, "or because it never found you, as it never has me."

"What would you say my proper work was, Hester?" Edith continued.

"Motherhood."

"And what do you consider your proper work?"

"Motherhood," Hester answered again.

"You're right I think, Hester," Edith agreed, "and yet," she shuddered a little, "it's a vile business, and it spoils the figure."

Hester said nothing. "Have you enjoyed this evening?" Edith added after a pause.

"Oh, very much."

"Will it make life easier when you go back," Edith continued, "this New York experience I mean?"

"Yes, I think so. It came a little too late, I am afraid, to make me *live* any differently. But I'll *think* differently. And maybe sometime I'll *be* different. I haven't any courage, Edith. I don't dare to believe any of the things that you are all believing here, let alone do what you're doing. But I shall have memories. I'm listening to everything. What I can't understand I'm storing away. It's as though all my life I'd had a great empty garret in my mind. And now that garret's half full of *things*. When I go back, I'm going to take out all those things one at a time and examine them. I'll understand then all that I can't understand now."

"I think I know how you feel," Edith said softly. "The main thing is that it's a new experience."

"It's a new dream," Hester asserted.

Hester lay in bed for hours, her lids wide, her eyes gazing at the ceiling, one hand moveless at her side, the other tangled in the huge braid that wound across her bosom. Finally she fell asleep.

But somewhere in the early hours she woke with a start, sat upright.

For one instant she gazed wildly about her; for another like an animal, she snuffed the air; the third, she bounded out of bed, snapped on the lights, hurried to the door. But with her hand on the knob, she stopped, hesitated. The frightened look in her eyes died. She moved slowly back across the room, her head bent. She had opened one of the windows before she went to bed. Now, she opened the other. The moonlight inlaid roofs and chimneys with its frosty enamel. She stood, pulling in long draughts of air as though she were drinking. Finally she lay down, drew the clothes close over her shivering figure. She did not fall asleep again though.

CHAPTER VII

"My word but you are certainly one grand person to-day," Southward exclaimed when Dwight called the next afternoon. "That's a new suit, isn't it?"

"It is that," Dwight answered, "delivered from my tailor this morning."

"It's stunning. I like light clothes. And rough and fuzzy like that. It makes men look bigger and I like them to look as big as they can."

Dwight was unusually handsome that afternoon and it was not all the effect of his new, typically metropolitan clothes. Something emanated from him—an excitement that was half pride. It gave to his carriage more than its normal air of arrogance. When they were out in the street, he breathed a quick impatient sigh. "Thank heavens, we're together at last! Do you realise that though it's a week since you arrived this is the first time we've been alone?"

If Dwight was excited, Southward was radiant. Some inner turbulence came from her in great snapping waves of activity. Her feet skimmed over the ground and once or twice they broke into little definitely-dancing steps. Smiles kept curling her lips; and always at these times, when her eyes met Dwight's, his smile answered them.

"What a remarkable statement," Southward replied. "We've danced together and walked together and talked together—many times."

"Oh, but you know what I mean," Dwight asserted impatiently. "There's always been somebody about or near—and generally waiting for us to do something or other. Now, we've got a whole evening alone and, by Jove, we're going to make hay while the sun shines. It's my day off, you see."

"I'm for making hay," Southward answered lightly. "Always! Lead me to the hay-field, wherever it is. What are we going to do?"

"I thought we'd walk up the Avenue first and then dinner. And afterwards—well, we'll see then."

"All right," agreed Southward. "I'm still in the mood when, as everything is new, everything must be wonderful."

It was getting towards five and the Avenue bore the usual crowds. They plunged into it and through it, crossed to the west side and started north.

"What extraordinary-looking women!" Southward commented. "That's the first thing that always impresses me when I come to New York. I'm glad I'm going to stay here long enough this time to get accustomed to them. They are so different from Boston women and so dazzling that I have never yet been able to classify them. Sometimes, though, I think it's only a matter of clothes."

"You bet it's only a matter of clothes," Dwight agreed. "I guess they're a surprise to all of us at first; but you get used to them. Now I can realise how different they are only by going somewhere else. To tell you the truth 'somewhere else,' as far as women are concerned, looks pretty good to me. You see I've been in New York for five years now and I've had a bad attack of New Yorkitis—the Broadway fever. I simply could not leave it. I've even spent my vacations here. Oh, of course I've taken little dashes, in week-end visits, to the country but among people who made those places only smaller New Yorks. It was old John who rescued me from all this when he made up that party to go to Shayneford last summer. Believe me, I didn't want to be rescued. John simply abducted me and took me off. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, for I got some exercise and—oh, well, you know what we did down there. What I'm getting at is that I can't tell you how pretty those country-girls seemed—so fresh and all tanned and freckled up."

"Well, naturally, that seems a warped point of view to me," laughed Southward. "I who have been condemned to Shayneford all my life have an altogether different opinion of it. However, it's all natural enough I suppose."

All this time, as she talked and listened, Southward's quick darting glances were beating back and forth through the crowd. At no time since her arrival in New York had that characteristic present-mindedness of hers been more apparent. At this instant, her eyes stopped on the approaching figure of a young girl, surveyed her critically. Dwight's glance followed hers.

"Get that hair?" he questioned. "Looks as though it had been turned out of a mould, like jelly. Nothing short of a charge of shrapnel would disturb it. I notice lots of women with hair like that. And I always wonder how the deuce they keep it so slick. I wish somebody'd tell me how it's done."

"I'll tell you how it's done," Southward volunteered, "in her lap."

"In her lap," Dwight repeated, mystified, "you mean——"

"I mean that most of it is false," Southward explained. "She curls it and waves it carefully and then pins it on. When you see a girl whose hair is as perfect as that, you may safely conclude that it never grew on her head. If it looks like the dickens, you may be sure it's still rooted there."

"That explanation never occurred to me," Dwight said, and his tone was slightly chagrined. "I pride myself on being a reporter too."

Southward was paying no attention. Her eyes had fixed on another advancing figure.

"Ermine!" she remarked. "Look at it. She's had it at least ten years. Perhaps longer. Who knows—it may have belonged to mother. She thinks because it's ermine, she must never cast it aside. She thinks ermine is like diamonds—age cannot wither nor custom stale—she'll wear it for ten years more and maybe hand it down to her own children. It's mangy and yellow and thin and ugly—but it's ermine. Selah!"

Dwight laughed. "I'm getting at the root of some hitherto-unrevealed mysteries," he announced. "Go on. Betray your sex. You've got the best audience here you ever had in your life."

Thus encouraged, Southward went on. "You see the red-headed girl coming—the one in navy-blue. Observe the bunch of violets she's wearing. Well, now, let me see. To-day is Thursday. He sent her those violets yesterday. She wore them to the theatre with him last night. They're dead now, but she thinks she's putting it over with us that they're fresh. Just," she added an instant later, "as the lady in mauve approaching believes that those gloves she's wearing are still clean enough to wear once more. She's just started out. I can tell that because her face is so freshly-powdered. That might not mean anything—she could have stopped on the way for re-enforcements, but that is a perfectly fresh veil; this is the first time it's been tied. She hopes everybody will think that she's been wearing those gloves all day and that's why they're so soiled. Look at the hat—to the left there. She trimmed it herself with that near-artistic scarf. She thinks she's done a good job. She has not the remotest idea that her decoration is so lop-sided that it pulls the hat way down on the back of her head."

"Dear! Dear!" Dwight commented in mock disgust. "I'll never root again for ballot-privileges for that sex of yours."

Southward went on to call his attention to the prevalence of shops whose signs showed lettering of a skeleton gold, to sum up certain window displays as lacking in "pep" and others as notably "smart"; to call attention in one passing motor to the dogs which exactly matched in colour the furs of their luxurious owner and in another to a pair of little girls whose hair exactly matched their mother's; to one girl who was obviously wearing the coat of one suit with the skirt of another and to a second whose heels were so run down that they had the effect of crippling her feet.

"I never knew what the phrase 'shoes run down at the heel' meant," Dwight said, "and I've always wondered. Thank you, for enlightening me. But I see you're a great little enlightener."

"One of our best." And Southward continued to enlighten. Under Dwight's encouragement, she barbed her remarks more definitely with malice. The more cutting she became, the more Dwight laughed. "You little cat!" he accused her once. But there was no disapproval in his tone.

In fact, later, "Do you know," he burst out suddenly, "I think I'll use that fresh eye of yours in some Sunday stuff, 'What the Country-Girl Saw.' Save up your impressions for me."

"Sure!" Southward agreed,

They had dinner in an uptown café—a blare of colour and glitter, noise and smells, the fresh perfume of the flowers mingling with the stale odours of food, the crash of the music competing with the splash of a fountain, and in the noisy laughing crowd all the usual hectic figures of New York Tenderloin life. It was nearly nine when they emerged into the starry, frosty night. They had had cocktails and afterwards a light heady wine. Southward had drunk sparingly of both, but Dwight emptied the bottle. The effect was evident, but not unpleasingly so, in an extra exhilaration.

"Now we're going to a party," he said.

"What, another party!" Southward commented.

"Yes, certainly, another party. You must get accustomed to that. New York life is just one party after another. In fact, I must say that life here is one long party."

"Suits me all right," Southward asserted. "I can't go to too many or stay too late."

"In fact," Dwight added, "there are two or three parties to-

night. And if we don't like the first—which is more than likely—we can go to the second."

"Then," Southward responded lightly, "I hope we hate the first and the second and eke the third. In fact the more parties we go to this evening, the better I shall be pleased."

Dwight signalled a taxi and they sped across the city east to Fifth Avenue and then north. They stopped before an apartment-house of granite, the replica of many others that they passed. Dwight rang a bell and, without waiting for any message at the tube, advanced to the inner door which immediately clicked open. They stepped into an elevator and moved slowly upwards.

"This party's no good," Dwight remarked, "if it had been, we should have heard the revelry two blocks away."

They passed through a door which had evidently been left open for them, into a long hall on which was strung a series of small rooms. They passed them all, laughing and talking, until the aspect of the front room reduced them to precipitate silence. It was crowded with people sitting in rows of chairs; dimly-lighted; silent except for one voice. The rows of enraged faces which their noisy entrance had flashed towards them gradually turned back in the direction of the voice. Southward and Dwight slipped into seats near the door. Dwight dropped his eyes to the floor but Southward calmly surveyed the scene.

The big room was really two rooms, papered a brilliant red, the only decorations plaster replicas of skulls, gargoyles, and animals. Three lights hanging from the ceiling were shaded with red silk and hanging fringes of paper snakes. The voice was reading a poem. They had broken into the midst of it, but the interruption seemed but to give it fresh life; it went on interminably. Finally, however, though it had shown no intention of coming to an end, it stopped abruptly; the reader sat down in the midst of the tumultuous applause of an audience that in its enthusiasm also leaped to its feet. Under cover of the confusion and congratulations, Dwight drew Southward quietly away.

"Not that party," he decided, "I hope you'll forgive me. But wasn't it a wonder?"

"It was a marvel," Southward admitted. "I wouldn't have minded staying."

"Too much like work," Dwight said. "The extraordinary part of it was though," he added thoughtfully,—“and this is rather typical of New York—that the poem was pretty good.”

"Well, do you know," Southward agreed, "it struck me that

it wasn't half-bad. The poet was rather good-looking too," she added with a reminiscent thoughtfulness. "By the way, do you write poetry?"

"Not guilty!" Dwight answered promptly.

"I'm so glad. I hate poetry. Most of the time I can't understand it. And then I hate the poetic vocabulary. I can't tell you what a rage it puts me into when I see a *window* called a *casement*."

They walked over to the Avenue and took the stage downtown.

"There's no knowing what the next party will be like," Dwight warned her. "It may be worse. But we've got to sample them one at a time until we find one that we approve of. The night is still young, you know."

"Don't mind me!" Southward objured him lightly. "I can only reiterate the more the merrier. Everything in this here-and-now New York is fish to my net."

They stopped at Washington Mews just above Washington Square. At what looked like a stable, Dwight rang a bell. The door was opened by the "Jungle Doc" who whispered in a stage-whisper. "Hullo, people! Come on in, the water's fine!" Back of him, curling through the door, came, ineffably sweet, the wail of a violin.

They tiptoed into a large bare room, lighted by ship lanterns. Some partially-completed groups of sculpture, covered with white cloths, stood about on tables. It was not a big party and it had formed itself into a half-circle that faced the door. They were sitting or standing, utterly relaxed: dreams lay soft and still on every face. The violinist finished, fitted his instrument tenderly into its case before the spell broke. Immediately a loud voice started an argument.

"There's Joe on psycho-analysis, again," the "Jungle Doc" announced in disgust. "We've been trying to choke him off the whole evening."

"All right," Dwight said hastily, "we'll be back later when he's got it out of his system. I've heard that spiel so many times that I know it by heart. Come on, Miss Drake."

In another instant they were in the silvery clear night air again.

"Congratulate me on my presence of mind," Dwight entreated. "If you only knew what I've saved you from."

Southward laughed. "Still I suppose it would have amused me," she admitted.

Dwight tucked her arm into his. "Not a chance on earth.

I'll take you for a little walk now. I seem to have run out of parties. Gee, I'm strong for this neighbourhood. I ought to have a place right on the Square. I did once—sublet rooms for the summer off a chap I know. It's a real breathing-spot and there's always something doing here. The wops give it a lot of colour. But there's another quality. The sky is—or seems—a different blue from the rest of the welkin. I've often heard artists speak of it. And if you'll believe it—crowded Manhattan that it is—the birds sang so loud in the tree-tops that at first they waked me up at dawn every morning. I lived on the second story and at night the electric lights outside used to throw the shadows of the trees onto my ceiling through the long windows. It was an extraordinary effect—and believe me, kid—a strange sensation to fall asleep at night in a bower of leaves, or the ghosts of leaves. Seemed like Merlin and Vivien and that sort of thing."

"I have a horried fear that you're talking poetry," Southward protested.

"Easiest thing I do," Dwight admitted. "I lisped in numbers. By jiminy, this is some night."

The exhilaration had evaporated as his distance from the wine grew, but now it began to mount again in the crisp air. "Gee, I'm glad you're here in Manhattan. Captain Southward Drake," he said. "We can have a great time together. Again I warn you, don't forget that I have the New York rights."

"I'll remember—if you'll remember that there are limitations to those rights. Of course I intend to go about with other men, just as you intend to go about with other women." Southward said this in a tone of indignation as though her independence were being curtailed.

"Oh, of course!" Dwight backed away hastily. "However, if there's a determined rush in your direction, I shall have to begin to defend my rights. I suppose by this time," he threw off carelessly, "they're appearing in bunches."

"No—oh, no," Southward affirmed, "only a few. Mr. O'Reilly has been very kind about offering to show me New York. I believe we're going somewhere next week. The rest are negligible."

Dwight said nothing but some of the exhilaration seemed to drain out of his personality. He looked at his watch. "Getting towards eleven, we'd better—hi. what's that?"

A sudden burst of song came tearing across the Square.

"There's a party over there somewhere!" Dwight exclaimed.

"Let's go to it. I don't know where it is, but we'll soon find out. The hardest thing in the world to conceal is a Village party. And I may not have met the people who are giving it but I don't know what that's got to do with the case. Come on!"

They hurried to the south side of the Square, Dwight keenly following the sound. "Oh, that place!" he exclaimed, "I'm sorry. I'm bound to know somebody there. It would have been fun to have come on a gang of strangers and say, 'Pardon us, but you've got a party for sale and we want to buy one. Can't we connect?'"

They ascended three flights of stairs in the comfortable old house at which Dwight presently stopped. As they neared the top, the noise became deafening. When Dwight opened the door of a little front room, it was to let out a blast of song that nearly blew them back down the stairs.

"Good morning, Patricia!" he greeted the agreeable young man with whom he immediately shook hands, "Patrick O'Rorke, Miss Drake. It's no use, Patricia, in trying to give a party without inviting me. My intuition tells me what's going on and I just come."

"I see that," said Mr. O'Rorke. He cast an appreciative Celtic eye in Southward's direction. "But say, we can arbitrate this. Any time you bring Miss Drake, I'll let you in free of charge."

The music had stopped during this interchange of pleasantries. The people, sitting about on chairs, window-seats, the floor and each other's laps, shouted noisy greetings. Room was found for them on a settee and without introduction they seemed at once to become a part of the gathering. The singing kept up for an hour. They sang American songs, French songs, German songs, college songs, ragtime, and hymns. All the time a stout white-haired individual stood by the gas stove at one side of the room, stirring a concoction which Dwight whispered to Southward was mulled wine. At intervals he ladled it into the collection of empty utensils that stood about; delicate wine-glasses, thin, frail, gracefully engraved; goblets, thick, heavy, and deeply-cut; plebeian-looking tumblers; cups with handles and without; tin mugs. One man drank from what was palpably a silver christening cup and another from what was obviously a shaving-mug. All that exhilaration that had died down in Dwight flamed up again under the influence of the singing and the wine. A spark caught on Southward's subdued spirit and set it ablaze.

Once a good-natured policeman appeared at the door to offer a mild remonstrance, but he was placated with a long glass of

the mulled wine. Somewhere after twelve, the singing party adjourned but only to reconvene across the Square as a dancing party. Still singing though running—and stopping occasionally to play snap the whip in the wide spaces of the Square—they gained a studio in McDougal Alley, waked up two painters who inhabited it, ordered them to open their doors. They opened the doors, but themselves returned to bed immediately, undisturbed by the dancing that went on for an hour. From here, they went to another studio and another and another.

It was three o'clock when Dwight returned Southward, still fresh, to her apartment.

"When am I going to see you again?" he asked as she stood at the lower door.

"Oh, any time," she answered lightly. "I've nothing to do and as you know always ready for anything. And I'm by no means overrun with engagements yet."

"Let me see," he meditated aloud. "Of course, being on an accursed morning paper, I have only my mornings beside my day off and the occasional extra day that I have screwed out of them. To-morrow I have an engagement to write at Azile's. The next morning we're going off on a lark together. The next—I'm free. I'll call you up sometime about nine. Hester doesn't mind your beating it off like this?"

"Oh, no. Hester is the most understanding person in the world. Besides, we made an agreement that we should pursue our own devices while we were here. We neither of us could live any other way."

"Well, then I have nothing but the two engagements with Azile," Dwight summed it up, "and you're perfectly free?"

"Only that tentative engagement with Mr. O'Reilly," Southward murmured. "He said though there were a lot of things——"

"Oh, of course," Dwight interrupted. "Good night!"

"Good night!"

Dwight, with a step rather less buoyant, proceeded slowly down the street and Southward, with an aspect decidedly more sober, walked slowly up the stairs.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN John called for Hester a few days after the party, he looked tired and seemed preoccupied. He sat in their little living-room in one of his characteristic attitudes, one foot resting on the other knee, his arms crossed and his chin sunk on his chest. When Hester, her hat and coat and gloves on, came into the room, he aroused himself from his meditations with a start. He reached absently for his hat and stick; absently he pulled on his greatcoat. He was still absent as they walked down the stairs.

"Are you ill or tired or worried, John?" Hester asked timidly after a while.

"Not one of them," John said evasively rousing himself. "I'm just a little dopey from the rush of things in the office. It's hard sometimes to stop midway in the speed I keep up there." He sighed a gusty sigh of relief. Suddenly his preoccupation dropped from him, as definitely as though he had slipped the pack of some mental burden off his back. "I am glad, I admit it candidly, to have this half-holiday. I don't take one very often you know."

"I guess you don't take one often enough," Hester suggested.

"I don't think I work harder than anybody else in this town," John answered. "It's a place of concentrated action and concentrated speed. But I believe it goes deeper than that. The air in winter is peculiarly stimulating. It not only whips you on to extra work but gives you the strength for it. You'll find it so. But now let me see. I thought if you didn't mind, we'd walk a little first. There are some places that I'd like to show you."

"I'd like it very much," Hester said. "You know I like to walk."

"I know you do. It's one of the things I like about you. We can take some bully walks together if you have the time. I rarely walk with women in New York. Edith is the one I know the best and she doesn't like to walk, you know. Seems to me she walks less and less every year."

"You've known Edith a long time?" Hester queried idly.

"Oh, yes—years. She's the oldest friend I have in the world. You must get her out into the air if you can, Hester. She likes you a lot and you have a great influence with her."

"I'll try," Hester said simply. "I do think fresh air is what she particularly needs. Sometimes she looks so pale and waxy—it quite frightens me. And often at those times, she's so listless and so—so far away. I don't know how to express it exactly. It's almost as though her thoughts were in another world. I don't mean religious abstraction. It's something quite different from that. It's morbid, as though it came from bad health."

"I don't know exactly what you mean," John said. "Unless it's—I have often noted of late years with Edith that her talk is characterised by sudden spells of great articulateness alternating with periods of an almost irritating vagueness. I think she ought to be roused—taken out of herself in some way. But I confess I don't know how. I think you can do it though. I'm depending on you, Hester."

"I'll try," Hester said simply again.

They walked down the Avenue and gradually John's mood changed. He became interested, brisk, gay even. In a few moments, they were laughing and talking as though neither had a care in the world.

"You look better, Hester," John declared suddenly. "I'm going to tell you this every time I see you. Really, you don't look like the girl I met at Shayneford."

"I'm not that girl," Hester stated promptly. "I'm an absolutely different creature. And when I think of all I have done since I've been here—and all that has happened to me—it doesn't seem strange to me. Sometimes I cannot believe it has really happened. Why, just think! We've been in New York a week yesterday. We arrived on Wednesday in the afternoon. We went about all the rest of the day with you and Dwight, ending with that amazing masked party. It was three o'clock *Thursday morning* before we got to bed. Thursday night, we went to the party in your rooms. It was half-past two *Friday afternoon* when we got home. Saturday afternoon, I went to Edith's and stayed until Tuesday. We talked late every night there. Here it is Thursday again. I've never had such an experience in my life. I never even heard of such gaiety. I didn't know such things happened. And of course I'm tired. But, oh, it is such a different kind of fatigue from the one I brought on here with me. That old fatigue came from dulness and lassitude and discouragement and despair. And, let me tell you, it's much easier to bear the kind of tiredness that comes from having a wonderful time with a wonderful group of people."

"I understand perfectly," John assured her. "It was precisely that that I hoped we'd be able to do for you. I'm no physician, but my advice would be to keep right on getting just as tired as you can."

"I have a great sense of excitement all the time," Hester went on—and now she was analytic—"as though I were floating on great tides. You know how it is when you go in swimming and you get out to a spot just beyond where the waves break. There's a continual pull backward and forward and if you give yourself up to it, you can float on the surface without making an effort. That's what I'm doing now. I'm not thinking particularly. But, oh, there's a terrible sense of excitement in it. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Yes, Hester, I do," John smiled. "Perfectly. And I'm glad. There," he interrupted, "this is Gramercy Park. I brought you here purposely. Isn't it nice?"

"Charming!" Hester said. "This is where your club is. I used to address your letters to Gramercy Park."

"Yes, there are a lot of clubs here. Let's walk round it and I'll spiel. It's always very quiet here. I suppose it's partly because the Park is, in a sense, private property. And yet it's essentially different from the rest of New York. Of course the many club-houses help to make it quiet. But the old houses that we're approaching really give it its atmosphere. It always seems more like Boston—or London even—than New York."

"I've seen allusions to it in magazine fiction that I've read recently. Club-scenes almost always occur in Gramercy Park if the heroes are actors or authors or writers or painters. It's very amusing to get to know localities through novels. I have never been in London, but I know that physicians must always be put in Harley Street, detectives in Scotland Yard, night-adventures on the Serpentine, fashionable weddings in St. George's, Hanover Square, clandestine tête-à-tête dinners in Soho, that you must install your mistress in St. John's Woods, and that impoverished gentility must board either in Portman Square, Bedford Square, or Russell Square."

John laughed. "Your dope is all correct. And I see you've been some reader. Now, I'm going to show you another pretty spot."

They walked across town to Stuyvesant Square.

"This has something of the same quality," John explained, "even if the Park is divided by car-lines. This is a quiet neigh-

bourhood too; there are several hospitals here. Do you see that little low red-brick building? We must walk past it. That's the Friends' Meeting House. It gives the Square a charming touch. It's not very old. It was built sometime in the last century; and yet it has a venerable air."

"It is *sweet*," Hester said. "I would like to come to church here sometime. Will you take me, John?" Before John could reply, she added, as though offering inducement, "We can bring Edith. I think she'd love it."

"I think she would too," John agreed. "In fact I know she would. Now why have I never thought of that myself when I'm always trying to invent things to entertain her? Good suggestion, Hester! We'll do that thing some day."

Hester leaned against the railing of the churchyard and studied the quaint old building. Her figure drooped a little.

"I think your new clothes are all becoming, Hester," John said. "You remember the presumptuous lecture I read you at Shayneford?"

"*Remember!*" Hester exclaimed. "Shall I ever forget it? Do you remember the adjective you applied to me?"

"Perfectly," John answered with promptness. "Paintable."

"Of course it *wasn't*—it *can't* be true," Hester breathed. "But, oh, if you could only know how happy it made me, what a sense of power or triumph it gave me. Do you know what I did? I don't know why I tell you this but—but I went home and took my hair down and stood before the glass looking at myself and saying 'Paintable! paintable! paintable!' over and over and over again. Of course," she spurted on, as John attempted to speak, "I realise that it wasn't a complete 'paintable' you meant, only a mitigated 'paintable'; that you told me it all depended on my mood and if I were happy and contented and that I must learn to dress myself right and do my hair in a becoming way. I've tried to do that. And I tried to tell you I had the other night at Edith's. Did you get it?" She wheeled on him suddenly and fixed him with an intent glance.

"I got it." John answered sombrely, "but you don't think I hadn't seen it for myself, do you? It looks lovely—your hair I mean—you're doing it just the way it should be done." He stopped abruptly.

"Thank you," Hester said. She turned back and fixed unseeing eyes on the church; her tone became dreamy. "You don't know what you did for me. If I were never to see you again all the rest of my life, I should feel—should feel—that—that I owed

you a debt of gratitude that I never could repay. Never!" she reiterated with a kind of fierceness. "Oh, never!"

Neither spoke for an interval. Then Hester added out of one of those pregnant silences which seem but a continuation of speech: "I met mother when I came in—that night—and she saw there was something different about me and she tried to make me tell her—but she couldn't. So she tried to make me feel—— But she couldn't. Not *that* night. The next night perhaps and every other night afterwards. *But not that night.* It puzzled her for a long time—the difference in me." Hester's voice sank into another of those packed articulate silences. She did not speak again.

John did not break the spell. Then suddenly, "Now I think I'll take you to the subway," he ejaculated briskly.

Hester emerged from her *exaltée* mood to her usual docility. "All right!" she agreed.

"I'm going to show you something you've never seen before," John went on briskly as they moved towards Eighteenth Street, "a sight that you can see in no other city in the world. You know perhaps that, so far as most phases of art are concerned, America hasn't expressed herself with any great degree of originality. But we have had something new to say in architecture. And I'm going to show you the biggest thing architecturally we've said yet."

John talked with a feverish quickness, enlarging on his theme; and Hester listened with a feverish intensity. He poured his words out pell-mell and Hester absorbed them as hot sand soaks water.

"I've lived a bit in Europe," John ended his lecture. "I do know something about architecture. In a way, I've studied. For a while, I collected drawings and pictures and photographs and prints. I really went into it a little—though only as an amateur may. Europe offers opportunities for that sort of thing."

"You're all so travelled," Hester said with an accent of despair. "Edith particularly has lived so much in Europe—she's told me such interesting things."

"Yes," John answered. He added hastily, "But not so much as Azile or Morena. We are, as you say, a travelled group. I gave away my truck to a little country-town library in New Hampshire. That was when I definitely abandoned all idea of studying architecture and went in for being a reformer or a radical or a rebel—or whatever offensive term you please to apply to me."

Hester started palpably to ask a question, but although it trembled on her lips, she could not put it. And presently they entered the subway and conversation was for the time impossible. When they emerged from under the ground into the brilliant winter air, they talked of other things and particularly of the New York business scene which was flying past them, even at pedestrian speed, with a tremendous vigour and virility. Hester asked no questions when John drew her on a ferry-boat; followed without comment when he led her to the bow.

Sunset had come and almost gone. Twilight had started to drop her dusky mantle; the grey waters churned by hundreds of water craft were filmed with a yellowly-green sunset light. John kept Hester busy watching his various points of comment. That comment moved with a kind of erratic activity from the passengers on the deck near them to the big unexplored cities that fringe mammoth New York; back to the river craft. On the New Jersey side, he immediately bought tickets for the return trip; re-embarked at once.

"We're going straight back?" Hester said in mystified tones.

"Yes," John answered, conducting her to the stern. "But in a minute I'm going to show you the something beautiful that I promised."

The cold winter sunset had died to a gleaming streak close to the horizon. It was more like an enamel of brilliant glass set in the sooty sky than a suffusion of living light. It did not now mitigate the leaden look of the waters which, except for the white wakes that criss-crossed each other, had turned jetty.

"Now," John said. He led the way to the bow.

Hester gasped.

Before her lay the incredible sky-line of lower Manhattan. Straight, clean-cut, monolithic, colossal towered the forest of skyscrapers. They did not rise into the sky; they leaped, they soared. They did not pierce the heaven; they invaded it with a precipitancy that held both triumph and exultation. In the offices many of the lights had come on and they set this fabric of stone with an inlay of golden glass in which, prismatically mirrored, lay the blue and green of the sunset. As Hester watched, other lights flashed out. Outlines disappeared; separating spaces vanished; bulks loomed more massive; group merged with group until they became one stupendous mass, running jaggedly to great heights, spreading solidly to vast widths. Dusk deepened. Then more and more shadow-hung each instant and more and more light-shot, just as it had grown solid, it grew imponderable. It

had seemed a great sinister fortress that held men prisoners in the market-place. Frailer, it grew; thinner, softer: it floated. Now it was a fairy city of the heart's warmest desire; now some mystic city of the soul's deep hunger.

"Oh," Hester breathed at last. "That almost frightens me. It's too beautiful. It hurts. It's wonderful though. I love the feeling it gives me. It makes me want to do something—something violent and magnificent."

John said nothing. He watched an emotional excitement tear the last film of lassitude from Hester's face. "Ah, Hester," he said at length, "'paintable' is too poor a word. I've never looked at Michael Angelo's work," he veered suddenly, "Saint Peter's or especially that chapel of the Medici in Florence without wishing I could show him this. I have a conviction that he couldn't sleep until he had designed a city of skyscrapers. He liked bigness, you know. He took a great pleasure in designing the huge dome of St. Peter's. Just imagine what an inspiration it would be to him to be able to use height as nobly as he has used length and breadth."

They stood in the bow of the boat until they reached the New York shore; but they stood there in silence. They were silent for the main part on the way home. Hester kept falling deeper into her strange excited reverie: and John watched Hester. Once she said fervently, "Oh, I thank you for showing me that!" And another time, "It gives you a strange feeling—a courage—a kind of emulation!" And again, "Isn't it lovely just to be——" She did not finish her sentence; but she flushed a little and merged it with a look of embarrassed appeal.

"Yes," John concluded it for her with a repetition. "It is lovely just to be——"

They walked from the subway to the apartment, in the same silence. John did not ask her to dinner. He left her with a, "Good-bye, Hester. I can't say when I'll see you again; for I never know when my leisure will come. But it will be as often as I can make it." He hesitated an instant. "Of course Edith will have all kinds of plans for us three."

"That will be sweet," Hester said vaguely. "Good-bye, John."

CHAPTER IX

At first the experiences of the country-girls were so many and so various that they seemed almost unassimilable. Society brought strange juxtapositions but even the most everyday contacts, their brief inevitable shopping, the marketing for their toy household, provided them with a welter of new impressions. And when it came to the actual exploration of this crowded, colourful, alien geography, the complications of new sights, sounds, colours, and odours brought a fatigue that they had never known before. Often they fell on their beds immediately after a long tramp; they slept in hours and for periods unmatched in their experiences. Along with all this came constant contact with new people as, through the steady efforts of their New York friends, acquaintanceship increased.

Gradually however such hours as they spent together fell into a kind of routine.

They arose, late for Shayneford but early for New York, at half-past seven, prepared breakfast together. Their atom of housekeeping accomplished, always they set out exploring. First to the clean German butcher-shop around the corner where they lingered for a little talk with the fat German wife who, *c-less* and *d-less*, showed an interest flatteringly voluble in their welfare. Then to the Italian shop further up the Avenue for their vegetables, where Tony, the handsome, purple-faced, liquid-eyed Tuscan and Bianca, his velvet-haired, olive-skinned wife, soon fell into the habit of dropping everything to wait on the two girls. Then for a stroll in the crisp frosty sunshine of the New York winter, up Fifth Avenue. They loitered at this window and that, stopped to look at an exhibition of pictures, lingered a moment in the star-shot twilight of the Cathedral and then crossed always to the Park. Everything interested them there, the multiplicity of weaving paths, in which invariably they got lost, the reservoirs, the groups of playing children, the riding and driving, the zoo. Often emerging from a whole morning in the Park, they did not bother to cook luncheon; but ate at a Childs' Restaurant. This was an experience they found unfailingly entertaining. Their afternoons were spent mainly on the Avenue again, gazing in a perpetual surprise and curiosity at the passing throng. Anything might happen in their evenings. The tele-

phone was always summoning them to new experiences. One night it would inform them that there were tickets awaiting them at the box-office of some theatre; another night it would call them to a party, hastily improvised, and often held at a house they had never entered or by people they had never met. Or there were invitations to dinner. In spite of these distractions, however, there were plenty of evenings when the two girls sat at home and talked and read.

Hester's bedroom, being provided for that purpose with a couch instead of a bed, became their living-room. But they much preferred the big airy kitchen in which the sink and gas stove were concealed by a screen, where the big round table and wide-armed chairs made for comfort. There, Hester on one side of the student-lamp and Southward on the other, they sewed, read, and wrote letters. Often an evening would pass without a word between them. More often they talked without cessation. Sometimes, just at bed-time, Southward would break the silence with a, "Say, Hester, let's go over to Broadway. The theatres will be letting out in a moment and it will be awfully gay." Hester never refused. The two girls would fly into their things and rush across town, walking until midnight.

"Hester," Southward said once, "doesn't Shayneford seem like a dream to you?"

"No, Southward," Hester answered with an intensity of emphasis that made her tone almost fierce. "Shayneford is real enough. It's *this* that's the dream."

"I feel just the other way," Southward explained. "Shayneford is like a past existence—so far away and long ago. I feel as though this were the only life I'd ever known."

"How I envy you!" Hester sighed. "I'm as fascinated as you by this dazzling New York life, but I don't feel a part of it yet. I feel like a person who's wild to go swimming. I see the current flowing by and I'd give anything if I could throw myself in. But I can't make that first dive. I haven't the courage because I can't quite believe that I'll ever come up again."

"I wonder what all the old cats in Shayneford would say," Southward mused once, a glimmer of mirth starring her eyes, "if they could only know what we're doing—parties, theatres—turning night into day, even a cocktail occasionally. I expect that they'd talk about us for one mortal afternoon. As for the girls—well, I expect Pearl Wallis would tear her hair out by the roots."

"You must remember, Southward," Hester suggested slyly, "that with you gone from Shayneford, Pearl has a clear field with Lysander."

"I don't believe," Southward answered—and her lids shot down over the sudden predatory fierceness which blanked her mirthful glimmer—"that Pearl will be able to do much with Lysander. I hope not anyway. Lysander's too good for her."

"I can't agree with you," Hester said, "I think Pearl would be as nice as anybody if her feelings for Lysander weren't always coming between her and a normal attitude towards life."

But this elicited nothing from Southward. "Wonder how Gert is!" she meditated next. And then as though from the association of ideas, "Wouldn't it be queer if we ran into Josie Caldwell sometime?"

"I'd like that very much," Hester answered. "I shall never get over my fondness for Josie."

"I never liked Josie so much as you did," Southward said. "She was always too bossy when we played together. Too much like myself, I guess."

"Yes, she is rather a lady-of-kings type," Hester insinuated.

"Now, see here, Hetter," Southward replied, glimmering, "remember when you're quoting Isaiah you've got nothing on me. There are two of those lady-of-kings females. If I'm one of them, you certainly are the other."

Hester wrote conscientiously a long letter every day to her mother. Mrs. Crowell's letters came steadily twice a week. They showed a touch of concreteness that was entirely lacking from Hester's amorphic epistles. Southward particularly enjoyed them.

"Don't worry about me being alone," ran one, "I never was one to be afraid. Besides I have Libbie or Sue-Salome up for the night any time I feel like it. Flora Tubman was married last night. It was in the church. They had a reception afterwards. The wedding was all yellow and white and green,—dahlias and asters, great bunches of yellow satin ribbon, and green boughs. Everybody was there. Flora looked lovely—white satin with a tulle veil and some artificial orange blossoms caught in it everywhere. Her cheeks were as pink as peonies and her eyes just like stars. King looked as much a lump as ever. Of course Mrs. Tubman was nearly crazy what between keeping everything going and yet not letting anything that was happening get by her. Libbie was in yesterday. She said that there was a rumour round town that you girls kept beer all the time in your flat in New York. Mrs. Peters has told everybody in

Shayneford. Libbie asked me if it was true. I told her you hadn't mentioned it in any of your letters. But one thing I *was* sure—it *wasn't* champagne. Libbie said Mrs. Drake started that story."

"Now where did grandmother get that idea?" Southward demanded of the atmosphere. "Something I said in my letters of course, but what *was* it? It's a good idea though. Why don't we keep beer? I'll order a case to-morrow."

"Gracie Dodge is engaged to Harry Turner." Hester read on, "Of course Mrs. Dodge is tickled to death. And well she might be. Three homely daughters. There was plenty in this town never thought Gracie'd ever get Harry. Who do you suppose Myra Rowell is going with? Markie Allen. Everybody's talking about it. They say he's up there every night. Aline is going to have another baby. Mrs. Allen is about discouraged. She says this is the fifth in eight years and Aline is all worn out."

"Sarah Wallis was in yesterday." (This from another of Mrs. Crowell's letters.) "She is still harping on Gert Beebee and who the father of that child is. I told her probably Gert didn't know herself—only God knew and He wouldn't tell. I said to her I didn't see why she let herself get so riled up over it; every year since I've lived in Shayneford there's been two or three and sometimes more illegitimate children and it hasn't ever seemed to bother her so much before. She said that in those cases we always knew who the father was. 'Oh,' I said, 'it's only curiosity that's chewing you up.' Gert stopped in the other day with the baby—she was going by and I beckoned to her from the window to come in. First time I'd seen him. Smart little thing I must say and awful big for his age. He's got lots of red hair. I do declare though he don't look like anybody round here."

And later: "I never saw anything like how cheap you get vegetables in New York. And the variety! Makes my mouth water, just to read about it. But, land, you always live better in the city."

"Sue-Salome called yesterday. She said there was a story running round town that you two girls was living with Josie Caldwell and asked me if it was true. I said not since yesterday. And anyway I didn't think you two could afford to live so fine as Josie. Well *now*, who do you think is engaged—Aggie Bassett. Lord, I thought she was a settled old maid. That new doctor in North Shayneford—Dr. Eli Larrabee. It came as the greatest surprise to everybody. She's been visiting the Roswells over there right along and they do say Mrs. Roswell isn't any too

much pleased—she thought all the time it was Flossie Dr. Larabee was making up to. Maud Curtis's baby has come and it's a girl—she said if it was another girl she'd drown it but I haven't heard of any death in the family yet."

"Flora came to call yesterday. She thinks she's in the family way already and she's as happy as she can be. She looked lovely. She said that Mercy Brewster is beginning to go round with Fred Snow. Isn't that the greatest! Why, it don't seem more than yesterday that Mercy was running in here asking me for one of my ginger cookies. She's begun to put her hair up. Aggie Bassett is going to be married in the spring. And Gracie Dodge in the fall. Dora Crafts is going to have another baby. Seems as though all these letters consist of is people getting engaged and married and having babies. Well, come to think of it, that's about all there is in life."

Southward wrote at irregular intervals, letters struck off at lightning speed from an old typewriter that Dwight lent her. Her writing displayed all the forthrightness and terseness that characterised her speech. At long intervals came a note from Mrs. Drake; written in pencil on ruled paper, unpunctuated, the *I's* all small, as for example:

Dear Southward:

i was glad to get your nice long letter and was pleased to hear that you was having such a good time New York must be a very fine city i was only there once and that was over thirty years ago and Fourteenth Street was where all the best stores were i went into all of them and the Eden Musay and the Park, and Coney Island and i bought a lot of things my best black barbe was bought there and it is just as good now as the day i bought it for i have been very saving of it there is no reason why anything should ever wear out if you take good care of it i do hope you will look out for them automobiles when you cross the street and don't stay up too late nights as you will get old and wrinkled if you lose all your beauty sleep, and don't spend your money too fast and don't go around to them restaurants too much, as it is expensive and the food is not so good as what you can cook at home hoping you are both well, and with love to you and Hester from your grandfather and Charlotte and me

i remain

Yours truly

Lorenza Drake.

Southward enjoyed these letters enormously. She always read them to Dwight and occasionally to John and Ripley.

"I wish that Charlotte could write to me," she said frequently. "She'd give us all the news. Gee, doesn't it make me wild to think of Charlotte blind like that! When that Greinschmidt man gets to Boston, you won't be able to see my heels for dust, Hetter, I'll beat it back to Boston so quick. Charlotte doesn't know yet that her eyes are going to be examined, but I do."

Southward became a victim of the New York newspapers. She took half a dozen a day. Under Dwight's tutelage, she developed an extraordinary acumen in regard to them. She studied the various features both of the news and editorial pages, the signed stuff, the sporting page, cartoons, rhymes; Sunday editions. She came to have an acute sense of news values. Dwight told her constantly that she ought to have been a newspaper-woman. Long before Hester was awake, Southward had hopped out of bed, had possessed herself of the morning paper, had drunk down the news to the last dregs. She followed a famous murder-case with close attention, became an authority in regard to the evidence. Often at night, she would come in from the theatre bearing the latest faked extra; and she never attempted to sleep until she had read it thoroughly. Hester could not accustom herself to the hurly-burly of the metropolitan press, the screaming head-lines, the conflicting colours. Conscientiously she read the *Boston Transcript* which her mother forwarded to her every day and the *Shayneford Citizen* that came once a week.

The weeks flew by. Thanksgiving came in a flash and Christmas seemed only a week or two later. Dwight went to Vermont to spend both holidays with his father, and Azile joined fashionable out-of-town house-parties. Edith insisted on having a Thanksgiving dinner and a Christmas tree for their rather decimated group. She filled in the places of the absent and brought their number up to a dozen with the familiars of her own circle. For Christmas, they agreed to a rule that no gift could cost over ten cents, but Edith refused to stint herself when it came to hospitality. For the Thanksgiving dinner, she brought out all her reserves of silver, china, and glass. The country-girls sat down to such a table as for beauty they had never seen, such a dinner as for complication they had not guessed could be.

They were sitting alone one January evening in quiet. Southward had just taken up the evening paper. "Good Lord, Hester!" she exclaimed suddenly in an electrified tone. "Listen to this.

'Buster Welch marries. Buster Welch, the Bay State Champion Middleweight, was married yesterday to Miss Gertrude Beebee of Shayneford, Massachusetts.'

Southward dropped the paper and stared at Hester who, dropping her darning, stared back.

"What do you think of that?" Southward demanded. Then, "Say, Hester, wasn't there a prizefighter staying over in Wenett when—sure there was! I remember. His name was Welch. You remember that fall; Gert used to go over to Wenett right along to visit Sadie Todd." She stopped abruptly.

The two girls stared at each other.

"As sure as you live, Hester," Southward went on, "he's the father of that child. And now he's made good. Well, what do you think of that?"

"I'm glad," Hester said.

"*Glad!* So am I! I never was so glad in my life. Do you remember that night we called in to see Gert how she told us that the father of that child could lick any three men in Shayneford with one hand tied, and if he were to come walking into the room then we'd envy her? Well, here's the picture of this Apollo."

She handed the paper across the table. Hester surveyed a big hard countenance in which a nose, battered permanently out of its original contour, could not render sinister a prevailing Celtic jollity of expression.

"I like his face," Hester announced unexpectedly.

"So do I," said Southward. "But I admit I'm flabbergasted."

"I'm awfully glad for Gert too," Hester concluded.

"I'm so glad I don't know what to do." Southward suddenly burst into laughter. "My dear, what will Sarah Wallis say?"

They had come to New York in time to enjoy the last period of the Indian summer. November was a month of perfect days, crisp at morning and night; stilly warm at noon. The streets were filled with a purple haze that softened their heights and filled their distances with mystery. Such trees and bushes as New York possessed flaunted all the gorgeous dyes of autumn, put orange and crimson conflagrations in the purple vistas. Gradually, however, that soft still noon warmth vanished, the crispness of morning and night sharpened to a stabbing cold. With Thanksgiving came the first snow. In the middle of December a blizzard locked the city in an embrace superficially soft and smothering; in reality the grip of an iron hand. An army of men carted the snow away in a single day; but not before Southward, responding to Dwight's invitation, had spent a morning

walking with him through the Park. It grew steadily colder and colder; but ever the brilliant New York sun put something into the air that was like a flame at the heart of an icicle. Southward, who frankly loved winter, grew more sparkingly handsome every day. And even Hester, who as frankly disliked it, responded to that something electric in the atmosphere with a blue brightness of eye, a pink vividness of cheek, a quickening of her whole expression, and an alertness of movement that bade fair, if it continued, to work a complete metamorphosis in her.

CHAPTER X

SOUTHWARD of course got the map, social and geographical, of New York before Hester did. For one thing, she was a longer and stronger walker than Hester and for another she was more inquisitive and observant. And although Hester's temperamental lassitude was broken to some degree by the shrillness and clamour, the sparkle and colour of these new experiences, it recurred at intervals and often stayed for a long time. But Southward was more than ever present-minded, more than ever sharply curious. Often after their early morning walk, when she had delivered Hester tired and hungry at their apartment, she would herself start out again with undiminished ardour. Sometimes she turned uptown again, bisecting at an impetuous pace whole sections of apartment-house neighbourhoods, stopping only when she reached the northern limits of the island. At other times she wove back and forth from river to river.

"This city goes on and on, Hetter!" she said after one such experience. "It makes you feel that the suburbs merge with the outskirts of Chicago."

Sometimes she shot through the business end of the island to the water-front. "Oh, Hetter, Hetter!" she said once on her return, "the ships I've seen this day! Haven't you got the nerve to stow away in one of them with me?"

Southward took long car-rides and ferry-rides. She crossed all the bridges, which, like steel ropes, tie the island to the surrounding country. She visited the circle of cities which surround New York, to whose life the average New Yorker is profoundly indifferent and of whose very existence most are only half conscious. Constantly she explored country more strange to many of the people she was meeting than the purlieus of London and Paris. The huge map of New York which she pinned on her bedroom wall became criss-crossed with the written data of her experiences.

A little more than Hester, Southward responded to the tentative social welcome held out to them by the new people they met—but not much more. She made no real woman-friends. For here, as in the country, Southward was a lone wolf, too boyish,

too self-sufficient, too sure of herself to be a real comrade with the members of her own sex. With men it was different.

An evening with Morena followed very soon on her evening with Dwight. He called for her late one afternoon in middle November, an Indian summer day so warm that it seemed as though it had been left over from the summer.

"I thought I'd take you to Chinatown for dinner to-night," Morena suggested as they stepped out into the soft hazy air. "And I had an idea of a *matinée*, but this is too perfect an afternoon to waste indoors. How about a walk?"

"I'd like that better than anything," Southward answered. "I'm always ready for a walk, you know."

"Yes, I've noticed that," Morena commented. "You're rather different from the rest of our women in that respect. Edith's always too tired to walk anywhere—she lives in taxicabs—and Azile is always too busy. Abroad, one walks a lot of course; everything is so beautiful and so interesting. I miss it here. Have you seen the Bronx yet?"

"No."

"Let's go there. We can walk for an hour or so before returning. Really, it's one of the most beautiful zoos I have ever seen. You like animals, don't you?"

"Very much. Especially dogs. I think I like dogs better than anything."

"Better than men and women?" Morena queried.

They were in the subway train now and their conversation was limited to periods when the train stopped. With the perfect control of herself which sometimes amounted to insolence, Southward forebore to answer his question; waited coolly until they reached the next stop.

Morena, sitting in the corner turned sideways, and with his arms folded, deliberately surveyed her. His scrutiny was amused and admiring and yet obviously there was irritation in it.

All the effects of the life which Southward professed to find the pleasantest she had ever known showed in her face. Perfect health coloured it. High spirits irradiated it. Her lips, even in repose, kept rippling into vague smiles, and more than ever her inexhaustible fund of nervous energy tried to wear itself out in movement. She could not stand still. She could not sit still. Standing, one foot at least was always breaking into impromptu dance-steps. Sitting, one of them continually tapped the floor. Here in the subway, she had the effect of a winged creature who has just alighted, not butterfly, nor swallow, nor dove—nor any

gentle creature of the air—so much as a hawk on a marauding expedition who rests perforce while his wings flutter to be off.

"Not more than men but better than all women, except a few—Hester particularly," she replied equably when the train stopped. "Not all men of course. I like some men."

"For instance?" Morena asked lazily, still studying the face that she did not bother to turn further than its profile.

"Lysander Manning," Southward answered. "I like him. We've always been the best of friends. But there are very few like Lysander."

"Why don't you like me?" Morena demanded suddenly.

The train started again; and again with her calm insolence, Southward continued to muse until the next stopping-place.

"I don't know exactly," she answered then.

"I do," Morena declared.

If he had expected Southward to display curiosity, he was disappointed. She said nothing.

"Come now," Morena went on teasingly, "we're both lying. You don't entirely dislike me, and you know you don't."

"That's true," Southward agreed. "More than that, there are some things about you I like very much."

"Three cheers! What are they?"

"You have a spirit of adventure," Southward explained. "And you are really democratic; you have the feeling for people. Most people think they have that, of course, and some do. But it takes different forms. It happens to take the same form in you that it does in me. It isn't a matter of money with either of us. You don't care what people are or how they dress or where they live as long as they're different. I'm a little that way myself. I like it in you."

And then the subway clamour broke her words off.

When next Morena spoke, he had changed the subject.

"You're looking awfully fit. This change has done you a lot of good. But I remember I don't have to tell you that you're good-looking. You admitted in Shayneford that you knew it."

"Yes," Southward announced without smiling. "I have learned that fact about myself."

"I have often wondered," Morena went on, "just how much an attractive woman understands her own attractiveness. Of course she must know when her features are good. But how much does she appreciate the degree of her charm—physical, sexual?"

"Couldn't answer that question," Southward replied. "And especially in regard to other women. Of course for myself, I

know that my eyes and teeth are all right and my complexion. There's one side of my profile bothers me though and I wish I could change the end of my nose."

Morena laughed.

"You probably would take all the individuality out of your face. Now there's another thing that puzzles me. I mean the women who, from my point of view, seem always to wear the wrong clothes. I'm not referring to the frumps and dowds. Count them out. I mean pretty women—attractive women—you see them all the time—who with premeditation and elaboration plan clothes that are good-looking enough in themselves but just the wrong things for them to wear. At least," he added hastily, "they seem so from a man's point of view. Women for instance who ought to wear frilly feminine things affecting a masculine plainness and simplicity, anæmic women who dress in the Oriental colours; blowsy, stout women who go in for Dresden china blues and pinks. Now, why do they do that?"

Southward shook her head. "I don't know. I suppose they're trying to be the type they most admire themselves. But I'm not sure. Clothes don't interest me very much. I like them to be of nice material but as simple as possible."

"Yes, I've noticed that," asserted Morena. "I think you strike the right combination of femininity and boyishness. It exactly suits you. Yet those Chinese coats you wear suit you too. Now Edith——"

The train started again and his voice merged with its noise. He waited an instant. When the silence came, Southward did not speak.

"Oh, Edith!" he exclaimed as though suddenly remembering. "Edith dresses in the extreme of femininity—charmingly I think. She is what the French call *soignée* to a degree. More so than any woman I have ever known. Dressing with Edith is a career in itself. Hester, it is apparent, has never known and never cared. Lately though, thanks to you, I suppose, she's begun to take more interest. It's improved her a lot. I prophesy that she will continue to improve in exact proportion to the interest she develops. Hester could make herself into a very interesting type. John has always said she was paintable, but I must confess I haven't been able to see it until lately."

The train tore through this analysis and he stopped: did not resume until the next quiet interval had nearly passed. "But now," he took it up where he left, "Hester has something alive in her face."

"She's quite wonderful-looking at times," Southward agreed. "But it's generally when she's alone with me. I don't think you've ever seen that aspect of her."

"No," Morena assented. "Yes," he contradicted himself. "Once, the first night I met you in the camp at Shayneford. Do you remember you made her take her hair down? I never saw such hair. I can still see her figure quite lost in those great golden torrents and the firelight playing on her. Now Azile——"

The train interrupted here. He rested mute until silence came again.

"I think you'll find the Bronx very interesting," he began as soon as he could make himself heard.

"You were saying something about Azile," Southward interrupted.

"Oh, I had forgotten." Morena paused and had the effect of plunging a long way backwards into his own thought. "I can't remember but it's of no consequence."

"It was something about the way she dressed," Southward assisted him.

"About the way she dressed," Morena repeated meditatively. "Curious how one slips a cog in this remembering business. However, don't bother, it's sure to come back. My most priceless thoughts always do."

"You had said," Southward persisted, "that Hester was beginning to care and Edith was *soignée* and you had just started to say something about Azile."

"Oh, of course!" Morena exclaimed electrically. "I have it. I was going to say that I think Azile understands her own beauty and her own powers of attraction more than any other woman I've ever known. She's a skilful dresser—that lady!"

"Yes," Southward said, "I've observed that."

There were several seconds of silence before the train started and during those seconds Southward was visibly *distracted*. Morena smiled to himself.

Morena had visited many zoos in Europe and as he took Southward from one animal house to another, he talked of London, Paris, and Berlin.

"These buildings are very satisfactory," he said, "commodious and clean and bright and airy and all that sort of thing. But the Romans have the best scheme. There are no cages in their zoo, no rooms like these, no bars. Only patches of ground covered with rocks and bushes surrounded by wide trenches. You don't see those trenches sometimes until you come to the

low fences which keep you from tumbling into them. You get quite a start, believe me, when you suddenly catch sight of a lion, not very far distant, strolling casually in your direction."

"Oh, I should like that!" exclaimed Southward. "That would interest me more than anything in Rome—the Forum, the Coliseum, St. Peter's—anything."

"Perhaps we'll all go abroad together sometime," Morena threw off idly. "I'd like to be with you the first time you see Europe. Of course though, now, everybody's prepared for it—what with pictures and the movies. I don't believe you'd turn a hair. You're such a cool proposition."

Southward did not reply to this; apparently it did not interest her. "I do love lions and tigers," she burst out suddenly after a long interval in which she stood immobile before one of the lion-cages. An enormous bushy-headed yellow cat behind the bars opened his eyes somnolently, surveyed her and then disdainfully closed them again. "It's their strength, tremendous yet so quiet and so quick. I love that kind of strength wherever I see it, in men or animals. Just lumpy strength—strength in the mass—doesn't make such a hit with me."

The lion stretched, yawned, arose; padded with a silent long-muscled grace out the door that led into the next cage.

"It gives me a great thrill to watch him!" Southward declared. "The ease of his movements—the grace with which his muscles generate motion. There's something almost liquid about that glide. The bears entertain me but they don't delight me. They have strength and speed without ease or grace—they lumber so. The tigers and leopards fascinate me more than any of them because of their suppleness. But it's the lions I like the most. Somehow I feel as though lions would play the game. If I'd been an early Christian martyr and they'd given me my choice, I would have been flung to the lions."

"I've never hunted big game," Morena confessed, "and I never shall now. The time in which I could have enjoyed it has passed. I'm rather a poor Spaniard, I don't like bull-fighting. When it comes to animals I'm all Irish. Sometimes though I wish I had had some experience hunting in the African jungles."

They went from cage to cage, omitting none of the big beasts. And over this common interest, their talk never flagged; grew by steady degrees more intimate and confidential. After they had seen all the animals, they took the pretty walk that leads to the waterfall.

The reactionary warmth of the day had melted some of the frost in the ground. The tree-trunks were blackly damp. The maze of ebony branches seemed to tear a complicated criss-cross on the hard blue of the sky. The little brook purled with a summer tinkle. Now and then a bird-note sounded.

"I've enjoyed this very much," Southward said as they returned to the subway. "I'm going to bring Hester out here some day. And then I'll be coming all the time alone. I can always get rid of a grouch just by watching animals."

"Any time you want company call me up," Morena suggested. "I'm not tied down to regular hours, you know. I can take an afternoon or morning off when I please. I'd like very much to come here again with you."

"Thanks!" Southward said carelessly. "I'll remember that."

They dined as Morena suggested, in Chinatown.

"I don't take women here very often," Morena explained, "although I like Chinese cooking myself. I think most women don't like it. I had a feeling you would though."

"I do," Southward announced lightly. "When I was a little girl, an uncle who was in the navy brought home a China boy from one of his voyages. My uncle had got so used to Chinese cooking in the Orient that he couldn't give it up. I've often had food cooked in the Chinese fashion. And then I've had dinner in the Boston Chinatown once or twice."

They dined in an upstairs café at a window which opened onto a little narrow curved street, packed with strange colour and stranger smells. They had Chinese soup first, very thin and pale with what looked like great green leaves floating in it; then chow mee and chop suey; viscid preserved Chinese fruit, brittle papery Chinese cake; thick heavy Chinese candy covered with bird seeds; spicy, sweetish Chinese nuts. They drank several pots of steaming Chinese tea.

When the Chinese waiter brought the soup, he offered with it Occidental spoons of metal and a little short Oriental one of china. Southward chose the latter. Morena observed this without comment but when, later, she chose chop-sticks in preference to a knife and fork, he looked surprised. He took chop-sticks himself.

"I learned when I was a child," Southward explained. And she proceeded to demonstrate the truth of this statement by a use so skilful of these strange implements that the waiter contemplated her for an instant of slant-eyed immobility.

After dinner, Morena took her from shop to shop of the

picturesque district. Everywhere he bought her something but he seemed to make a point to purchase the kind 'of toy that would please a child. Southward manifestly enjoyed this. She was full of sparkle, laughter, comment. Neither her strength nor interest gave out and when finally they reached the end of their explorations, late though it was, she sighed regretfully.

"I've got to get up early to-morrow," Morena announced on the way home, "and go to work on an article."

"What do you call early?" Southward demanded.

"Eight o'clock," Morena answered, "and gosh, how I dread it! It's the hardest business for me to wake in the morning. I seem to sleep with an increasing heaviness, light at first and heavy as sheet iron towards morning. It's hard too for me to force myself out of bed even when I have finally waked."

"Why don't you get an alarm clock?" Southward suggested practically.

"I either sleep straight through the alarm or, after waking up, turn over and go to sleep again. What time do you get up?"

"Seven—unless we're too dissipated."

"Oh, I say!" Morena exclaimed. "That's a record for New York. Look here," he begged, "wake me to-morrow morning by telephone, when you get up, will you?"

"Sure!" Southward agreed promptly. "There's nothing in the world I should enjoy more than ordering a lazy man out of bed."

"And say," Morena continued in a wheedling voice, "I've got to work hard for the next three days. Wake me every morning, will you?"

"That's some responsibility," Southward said evasively. For a moment she reflected visibly on the situation. Then, "All right," she agreed. "I'll wake you every morning for the rest of the week, provided I don't stay out so late the night before that I want to sleep late myself."

"Angel!" Morena approved.

True to her promise, Southward called Morena on the telephone early next morning.

"Hello! Hello!" Morena's voice, a little sleepy answered. "Is this the angel?"

"It is!" Southward answered. "You're up. This is your signal to stay up. Are you awake?"

"Not so awake as I shall be if you'll stay here and talk to me for a while."

"You're as awake as you're going to be then," Southward retorted. "My coffee is waiting and I wouldn't let that get cold to save you from the everlasting pit."

She called him the next morning and the next and the next. Morena insisted that her commands over the telephone did more to dispel his drowsiness than his cold bath. He paid her many extravagant compliments on her voice, its clearness and carrying quality. He said it was like the sound of a waterfall in a desert. At the end of the week, Southward announced that her labours were over. But he persuaded her under one pretext or another to keep on indefinitely until it became a fixed custom. Gradually their morning conversations lengthened. Once, when Morena was relating a merry adventure of the night before, she interrupted to snatch her coffee from the table. She drank it leisurely, listening to his narrative. And once, in the middle of the afternoon, just before she curled into the nap which had become necessary because of some dissipation of the night before, she called up Morena and ordered him to wake her in an hour. The system became mutually active and mutually useful.

CHAPTER XI

SOUTHWARD saw more of Azile Morrow than of any other woman. Promptly within a week of her week-end stay with Azile, she invited her to go to a *matinée*. Afterwards they went to tea together. Within the ensuing week, Azile asked Southward to accompany her on an all-day "spree." Southward accepted. Azile arrived at the apartment at about eleven. They spent the morning going from place to place; Azile had come in a taxi and no matter how long they stayed inside the shops she kept the machine waiting at the door. They went first to a big department-store on the Avenue to buy the materials for an evening gown. Azile professed herself dissatisfied with everything they saw, and departed carrying an envelope full of samples. From there, they went to a smaller shop where, still dissatisfied, she obtained another lot of samples. Then to another department-store and another, then to a series of small specialty shops. Here she picked up all kinds of expensive trifles that she apparently had had no intention of getting when she started, had them sent home. In the end she went back to the first shop and bought the materials for two dresses there. She consulted Southward on many points and sometimes she followed the advice, oftener some sudden caprice of her own.

"You don't care much about shopping?" she said questioningly towards the end of their expedition.

"No," Southward answered, "not very much. It rather bores me. I don't spend much money on clothes. I can't afford it in the first place. And then I don't like to have many clothes. Twice a year I plan exactly what I need for the next six months, buy everything at one fell swoop. And then I don't think of clothes again until another six months have gone by."

"How curious!" Azile remarked. "I'm buying things all the time and so of course I'm going to the dressmaker every minute. I always feel that a new occasion requires a special costume. It's my way of setting the scene I suppose. Now this gown I have just bought—the purple and cerise—is for an occasion. Dwight's club has a Ladies' Day this month. He always invites me of course and I always plan to have something new for it."

Southward made no comment; and Azile herself seemed thereafter a little to lose interest in clothes. They went to a Fifth Avenue hotel for lunch.

The big room was overcrowded with tables that seemed overcrowded with women. Crashes of music from a concealed orchestra attacked but did not drown or interrupt a high shrill vocal clatter. The perfume of the flowers, abundant and exquisitely fresh, contended in the atmosphere with the savoury odours of the food that the waiters were scooping from the thickest of silver platters onto the thinnest of porcelain dishes. Everywhere tables were evacuating, filling up again, becoming concentrated centres of talk and laughter. Waiters tripped deftly through the perilous channels between these noisy islands, carving and serving with a quick, quiet expertness. A head waiter with an eye to every flicker of movement in the room surveyed the scene and ordered all these opposing forces. When he saw Azile, he hurried to her side.

"Did you reserve a place for me, Henri?" she demanded languidly.

"Yes, madam," Henri answered deferentially. He indicated a table with two chairs by the window.

Azile placed Southward in the position which commanded the room. She was assisted by a group of waiters who, even after they were seated, continued to hover assiduously in their neighbourhood. Henri handed them huge cards which offered them, in several languages, a choice of many foods.

"What would you like, Miss Drake?" Azile asked perfunctorily. But without waiting for an answer, "What's good?" she demanded of Henri, who still stood or bent, a deferential but sympathetic human right angle, at her side.

Henri murmured a patter of professional advice.

"What would you like, Miss Drake?" again Azile asked. And again without waiting for an answer, "Oh, it's all so hopeless. New York food is so bad and there's never anything new. Strawberries sound good. But will they be sweet, Henri?"

Henry was enthusiastic on the subject of strawberries.

"What do you say, Miss Drake?" Azile asked. "Don't blame me though if they taste like lemon-drops."

At Azile's first appeal, Southward's lips had started to form words. But at her second, they had not stirred. Now with a perfect composure, she waited an instant as if to make sure that an answer was expected of her. "Anything," she said at last—

politely but with a superb indifference, "I eat everything. What ever you order will please me."

Azile selected, after much discussion with Henri of every detail, a lunch that had the appearance of simplicity and an effect equally great of extravagance. It began with cocktails, for the mixing of which she gave explicit direction; it ended with the strawberries that she at last decided to attempt and which proved to be blood-red and delicious. It included a delicate thin soup, a delicate white fish with a French sauce, delicate slices of cold chicken, a delicate pale-green salad. All the time, she was bowing to people who were coming in or going out, or apparently ensconcing themselves indefinitely. Once she left Southward to join a group of women, who sumptuously dressed and elaborately made up, emitted at a neighbouring table a maelstrom of excited talk.

"They're going to a *matinée*," she told Southward on her return. "'Mary's Mother.' I have some tickets for it in my bag and perhaps we'll drop in for an act or two later. They say it's good but you never can tell. I should hate it to turn out tiresome. I've got to do a little more shopping first though."

The shopping entailed going to a bookstore where she bought a volume of essays.

"It's to be sent," she directed the salesman. "Give me pen and ink, please."

With the fountain-pen he handed her, she inscribed a long message, apparently in the nature of a note, on the fly-leaf. Then she gave the address—Dwight's.

"There's an essay in it on *The Point of View in Fiction*," she explained. "Dwight and I have been having a discussion on that matter and I'm bolstering up my side of the case with authority. Do you know anything about it?"

Southward answered this careless explanation with a statement equally careless. "We used to have some discussion about it in college. But I really know nothing about it. It never interested me."

They emerged into the air again.

"Let me see," Azile meditated, "I really don't think of anything else I can do now except—oh, yes, I'd better call Dwight right up and tell him I've sent the book."

They went to a hotel for this. Southward sat in the lobby opposite the telephone-box into which Azile shut herself. Through the glass door, Azile's figure was clearly distinguishable. It was a long conversation and apparently an interesting one. Azile

dropped nickle after nickle in the slot. Several times, she threw her head back and laughed with an appearance of mirth, almost uproarious. She was laughing when she opened the door.

"Dwight is a witty thing," she commented. But she vouchsafed no elaboration of her remark.

They walked up the Avenue, Azile racking her brains, she said, to recall the many things she needed; for the want of which she prophesied, she would "perish" the instant she got home. Passing another hotel, she suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to ask Dwight to join them at tea. She telephoned again. Another interminable conversation ensued. As before when she came out of the telephone-box, she was laughing.

"He says he'll call at the theatre for us," she announced to Southward. "I think we'd better be making our way up there now."

They started in the direction of the theatre; but twice articles that Azile saw in window displays and twice things that she suddenly remembered took them into shops. The curtain of the first act was just falling as they gained seats. Southward found the play interesting and said so once. Azile found it dull and said so many times. She complained because their seats in the second row were a little too near. She explained that she had forgotten the irritating fact about this particular theatre that the front seats were too low for comfort. Her comments proved that she had experienced preferences in seats in most of the New York theatres. She bowed to many people and, between the third and fourth acts, slipped away to join a party of women in a stage-box. When they left the theatre, they found Dwight waiting for them.

"This seems to have been a regular tear!" he remarked cheerfully after Azile had given him a detailed account of the day's doings. "How do you like the New York pace, Southward?"

"I like it exceedingly," Southward answered briefly but with enthusiasm. "I've always known I'd like it."

"Tea?" Dwight went on. "And where?"

"Oh, the Pat," Azile answered, "Miss Drake will enjoy that. I'd like to be with her when she sees it for the first time."

Southward did not explain that she had been to the Patriarch before. Dwight also kept silent on this point. They sat for an hour in a room even more brilliant than the one in which they had lunched, and even more crowded with extravagantly dressed women. Azile chattered incessantly. She emitted a medley of

autobiographical data, social allusion, and derisive comment; clear apparently to Dwight but inevitably obscure to Southward. Dwight kept slipping in Southward's direction little swift explanatory phrases.

"What are you girls doing this evening?" Dwight demanded as he paid the bill.

"I have an engagement to go to a movie with Hester," Southward answered promptly.

"Oh, damn!" Dwight said in a disappointed tone. "And you, Azile?"

"Nothing," Azile answered hastily. "But how does it happen you're free? This isn't your day off."

"Yes, it is," Dwight interrupted. "Or it's one of them. I'm in holiday mood to-day because I've just pulled off a deal with the boss by which I'm to have two days a week. I'm doing double duty in other respects: so he loses nothing. But it will give me more time to work on the novel. I've got to celebrate to-night someway."

"I know how you're going to celebrate it then," Azile stated with a pretty dictatoriousness. "You're going to celebrate it by overhauling that last chapter."

Dwight made an impatient gesture. "Can't do it to-night, Azile."

"You must," Azile insisted with sweetness.

"No," Dwight persisted, "No can do. Well, perhaps after all the thing I need is sleep. I guess I'll hit the hay early, and make a good start to-morrow."

"Get up to the house early as you want," Azile said.

Dwight and Azile walked home with Southward. Neither would come up. They left together. Southward was silent through the simple but very delicious dinner which Hester had cooked for her. Her eye was absent. A frown played constantly on her brow and sometimes it deepened until it seemed that a sudden black glimpse of the Drake temper might show itself.

"What is it, O Lady of Kingdoms?" Hester asked gently once.

At this Southward's smile made a delicious glimmer under the black frown. "Insubordination in the ranks," she explained briefly. But her smile was but a brief burst of lightness. Her face fell back at once into a black gloom.

Hester did not speak again. Nor did Southward. The silence was so great that at the ring of the telephone both girls jumped. Southward answered it with an impatient "Hello! hello!" But

in a surprised voice, she added, "Oh, is it you?" and in a formal one, "Of course. We'd like to have you—very much."

"It's Dwight," she explained to Hester. "I told him that we were going to the movies to-night and he asked if he might go with us. Of course I said, yes."

Her voice and manner were perfunctory but that black cloud had magically disappeared from her brow. A something so triumphant that it was almost exaltation made her face brilliant. Curiously enough, even more than the dark frowning of a moment ago, it brought out that predatory cruelty which seemed, even in her gentlest moments, to lurk in her expression:

"That's all right," was all Hester said.

CHAPTER XII

HER first expedition with Dwight was soon followed by another, quite dissimilar in character.

"I'm going to take you three places this afternoon," he announced. "First of all we're going to call on Dora Dewing."

"And who," Southward demanded, "is Dora Dewing?"

"Dora is an authorine," Dwight explained. "She writes foolish stuff—futile little verses and silly little he-and-she stories. I hate Dora's work and I've often told her so, but I like Dora. She's a corker. It's a queer thing to see," he went on meditatively, "how those guys whose work you've been following for years match up with your ideas of them. I've noticed that particularly in interviewing. For instance, comes along a gink that you've admired at the distance of the printed page ever since you can remember. His stuff has done all kinds of things to you—wakes you up, makes you think, rings whole chimes of bells in your mind—he's your man in a manner of speaking. Even when he's at his worst, he has something for you. And then, by Jove, you meet him and he won't seem to have a thing on him. He's as empty as a drum and sounds twice as hollow. He's putting it all into his pen-finger. It's flowing out there in a steady torrent but there isn't a thing left inside. Believe me, that's some disillusion. Then appears another guy. You hate his stuff. You call it truck. It makes you tired. You go to interview him and he's a corker. He's got all of it—character and personality, charm and ideas too. He's got a lot on him but he doesn't seem to make any writing connection with it. I don't know but of all the experiences you strike, that's the strangest. So Dora. I hate her stuff, but Dora's the goods. Once in a dog's age, you meet a celebrity who measures up to specifications in both ways and, believe me, that's some experience. Why, when I went to interview Reberot—that fellow who's doing such marvellous exploration in the Andes—I got there at ten and we talked until three before either of us thought of luncheon. We just fell together."

To get to Dora's, they entered a low doorway on a West Side street. They walked through a long narrow dark hall into a short wide light one, knocked at a door at the end.

It opened and Southward gasped. The big room which they entered was one of two connecting heights as to ceiling and different levels as to floor. The walls were whitewashed a soft cream, the floors polished to a deep amber. There was little furniture; but for the first time in her life perhaps, Southward found herself looking at the things in a room, not the people. A big maple high-boy, a small maple low-boy, old Boston rockers, a sailor's chest, a small butterfly table, a big hundred-legged one, rag-rugs, samplers, silhouettes, portraits under glass—her eye slid from one to the other.

"I guess I've come as near to being homesick as I ever will," Southward admitted.

But this absorption passed immediately. Southward turned a gaze which carried its customary alert composure on the woman who at Dwight's "Oh, here you are, Dora darling!" turned from her guests to greet them.

She was a tall big woman, neutrally blond, superficially a little expressionless, an effect that a pronounced cast in one eye seemed to exaggerate.

"I'm glad to meet you at last, Miss Drake," she said, holding Southward's hand for a friendly interval. "It's nearly three weeks now that Dwight has been promising to bring you here."

Southward murmured a conventional reply. Miss Dewing turned to answer at length the question which Dwight put to her. Southward examined her with the minute scrutiny to which she submitted every woman.

Miss Dewing turned back to her at once and ignoring Dwight introduced her to all her friends. Miss Dewing drew her first with one, then with another, into talk while she poured their tea. She was a woman of a rare social gift, a quality that manifested itself slowly but which must in time have become evident to the most unperceptive. She not only never interrupted but she listened with a real interest and a rare deference. When she ventured a statement it was always a contribution. Perhaps it was one tribute to her personality that among her guests there were as many men as women. Perhaps it was a tribute of another kind that the women were all pretty. That it was an intimate group immediately became apparent. Christian names and nicknames flew about and the conversation took on that enigmatic intimacy often so baffling to an outsider. Miss Dewing apparently realised this; for she kept casting in Southward's direction little sidelights of description and explanation. And although she seemed to bear

so small a part in the conversation, deftly and unobtrusively she kept turning it into channels which Southward could enter.

"That woman's a wonder," Southward commented as they came out a half an hour later. "She grew on me. At first I thought she was awfully plain. But she was so charming, I found myself deciding that she was attractive before I knew it."

She visibly dropped into meditation from which Dwight did not for the minute arouse her. "It's always such a surprise when a plain woman like that puts it all over the rest of the women in the room."

"Such a flock of pippins too," Dwight answered. "Yes, that's a great scoop. I always like to see it done. John says that the plain woman with a big personality beats the beauty with only a limited amount of personality every time. He says you expect nothing of the plain woman and so anything you get is clear gain. And when the charm of personality begins definitely to assert itself—with the inevitable result of making her seem less plain and often of giving her an unexpected beauty—you feel that you've struck gold. The negative pretty woman is steadily losing in charm whereas the interesting plain one is always gaining."

"I see," Southward said slowly. "There's an awful lot in that, isn't there? But do you know it never struck me before."

"John also says," Dwight continued, smiling, "that if he were married to a pretty woman who was silly, he'd certainly kill her. It's rather amusing coming from old John. He's such a gentle cuss. He always says that he'd much rather marry a plain woman with brains than a pretty woman without brains because, in the case of the pretty woman, her beauty would ultimately become an extra exasperation. But John has always rooted for what he calls the hidden beauty, the beauty you discover yourself."

"I suppose that's why he enjoys Hester so much," Southward commented thoughtfully. "Not that Hester is plain of course. She's far from that. But her looks are so dependent on her mood—not perhaps that so much—as the people she's with."

"Yes. John has said something like that. I have never seen a woman improve as Hester has. She really looks like quite another girl."

"It's a miracle," Southward spoke with the gentleness of tone which always she employed towards Hester.

"She's not the only one the trip to New York has improved," Dwight insinuated slyly, "if improvement could be made on perfection. Believe me, young woman, you're somewhat of a looker

yourself these days. I can gaze at you several moments at a time without suffering perceptible boredom."

Southward accepted this, as she accepted all compliments, with composure, the faint glimmer of her mirth irradiating her eyes.

"Have you known Miss Dewing long?" she asked casually.

"Yes, for several years," Dwight answered. "We've knocked about a good deal exploring New York. In fact we're going off on a hike to-morrow."

On this Southward made no comment and Dwight himself vouchsafed no further information.

"One of my publishers—Wendell of Wendell and Daly—is giving a tea this afternoon," Dwight went on presently. "I thought we might drop in there—I called him up this morning in fact and told him I was going to bring you. Then there's a woman friend of mine—Jane Yates—who's trying to establish herself as a literary agent. I want you to know Jane."

They divided the interval between dinner at these two places. Mr. Wendell occupied rooms in a bachelor apartment on Madison Avenue. They were richly furnished; old French furniture, old French tapestries; a few good pictures, flowering plants; a tea service in old silver; and they were so big that although there were many people in them, they had no effect of being crowded. Tête-à-tête groups sat about in the delicate light from shaded candles, sipping their tea and talking languidly.

Mr. Wendell was a tall, portly man just entering the first period of a rubicund greyness. Youngish, oldish, it was difficult to say whether he was middle-aged or not. But apparently, Mr. Wendell himself had no doubts on the subject. The semi-flirtations, semi-jocular tête-à-tête into which he immediately drew Southward, proceeded on a plane of age-equality.

"Beat it!" he commanded Dwight, who grinned at his complimentary broadsides, "do get out of our cruising radius! Miss Drake and I don't want you blanketing all our finest effects. Besides, Patty Thompson is wandering about here somewhere with a copy of *Ginger* she wants you to autograph."

Simultaneously, came an exclamation, "Oh, Dwight! There you are, apple of my eye!" A big red-headed girl flew with an astonishing lightness across the room, straight to Dwight's side. She was carrying the brown-and-gold *Ginger*. "Write in it now while you have time, Dwight darling," she wheedled.

Dwight grinned but he obediently took the book.

"What shall I write, Patty my angel?" he demanded.

"Something sweet," Patty answered promptly.

"All right," Dwight acceded amiably. He wrote, "Something sweet." He added to it, "That's you, Patty my love!" and signed it.

"You villain!" Patty commented, with obvious delight, reading the inscription over his shoulder. "Thanks! Say, Dwight, when are we going to look up that haunted house?"

"Any time you set," Dwight answered cheerfully. "I'm free mornings you know and now I have two whole days a week. Thursdays and Fridays."

"How about next week, Thursday?" Patty queried.

"All right," Dwight acceded. "Thursday of next week. I'll make a Sunday story out of it, Patty darling."

Southward had been responding in a measure to the flirtatious sallies of her host. But all the time she had been surveying the assembly with a volley of her swift darting glances. Now, surreptitiously she studied Miss Thompson.

She was tall and so plump that she just grazed being stout, red-headed, grey-eyed, with a complexion of such a smooth whiteness that the deep rose in her cheek was like a stain on marble. She, it was evident, was the mistress of the ready rejoinder that passes for wit. With men, she alternately coaxed, cajoled, or rallied and harried. She drew Dwight into an impudent colloquy in which, in strophe and antistrophe, they made extravagant love or offered outrageous abuse to each other.

"You're a horrid person, Dwight," the lady concluded. "Sometimes I think I won't marry you."

"Cast me not aside, little one," Dwight entreated, as *Ginger* under her arm, she retreated to the group she had deserted; began to coquette with another victim there.

Dwight brought many of the company to Southward. It was prevailingly "smart" in tone. The women were exquisitely dressed, everywhere their beautiful furs made spots of shadow; their flowers touched the air freshly. The men wore correct afternoon clothes; often they looked more English than American. They did not stay long, but long enough for Dwight to accept a dinner invitation from Kathleen Warren, a tall blonde in sables and orchids.

"I just wanted you to get a glimpse of it," Dwight explained as they came out. "Now for Jane Yates."

"The literary agent?" Southward asked.

"Yes."

"Just exactly what is that?"

"She's the middleman between author and publisher. She

places the author's stuff and gets a commission on it. Jane's just begun to establish herself and she's doing well. It happened that Wendell and Jane were both giving a tea, and, as it was Dora's day at home—and she always has a mob—I thought it would be a good chance for you to see the whole chain. Jane's rather remarkable, I think."

"I should think that would be a fine job for a middle-aged woman," Southward commented thoughtfully, "and what a good name for business—Jane—how plain and competent it sounds! It inspires trust."

Dwight did not answer this but he smiled as at some amusing train of thought. Miss Yates' apartment was farther uptown and in comparison with both the other two, tiny. There were more people present than at either of the preceding teas; the rooms were definitely crowded. Dwight wormed a way for himself and Southward through a packed mob most of whom he seemed to know. They greeted him with every variety of badinage.

"Jane, love of my life," he exclaimed suddenly, "here you are, as usual surrounded by men. Here's the Cape Codder I promised you."

Jane was a startling woman, big but with a velvety dark beauty, Spanish in effect. This she quieted as much as possible by her simple gown of lustreless black, a white fichu pinned at the V-neck with a huge cameo-pin. Her crinkled, smoky-black hair done simply too, brushed softly from the milky middle part to an enormous bunch in her neck. Her great dark eyes and her wide red mouth put light and colour into a face that was the tone of old ivory. Back of the brooding duskiness of her expression, however, lay a resolved something that seemed to break in the quickness and efficiency of her movements. That alien, superimposed quality made a strange contrasting havoc of her native semi-tropical languor.

She asked Southward some of the questions that the seasoned New Yorker inevitably asks of the newcomer; but she asked them perfunctorily.

"By the way, Dwight," she demanded suddenly, "how is the novel getting on?"

"I'm working like the dickens on it," Dwight said. "Honest, Jane."

"That's what you always say," Miss Yates charged him. "But do you really mean it?"

"Sure, Jane!" Dwight answered fluently, "I'm tearing great

wads off every day. I'm nailing like the very old Nick. Ask Azile. Ask Miss Drake here."

"I don't know anything about it," Southward protested promptly.

"You little coward!" Dwight commented. "Not standing by a pal in his hour of need."

"I'm going to get a writ of *habeas corpus* out soon," Miss Yates threatened. "Produce the novel! Say, Dwight, can't you bring up a chapter or two some morning next week and read it to me?"

"Easiest thing I do," Dwight admitted, "reading from my own immortal works."

"Tuesday," Miss Yates decided after consulting the calendar that lay on her desk, "how about Tuesday?"

"O. K. for me," Dwight agreed. "Tuesday it is. Say, can't I bring Azile along? She's been awfully interested in it. Sometimes I tell her she knows more about it than I do. Certainly she's done her best to keep my nose to the grindstone. Jemimia Jane, you females is certainly born slave-drivers."

"Well, by this time," Jane replied, "perhaps you are ready to admit that that's what *you* need. Don't you think so?" She turned politely and included Southward in the conversation.

"I really don't know," Southward declared with equal politeness, "except that everybody does."

"Well thrust, brave girl," Dwight applauded. "Have at her again! I hereby appoint you my bodyguard."

"And I hereby decline the job," Southward announced.

"They all throw me down, Jane!" Dwight said with a display of burlesque self-pity. "I feel confident that you're the only one who will cling to me to the end. I know you'll send me flowers when I go to prison."

"I won't cling one instant beyond three months from date," Jane insisted, "unless you deliver that novel."

Dwight grinned. It was apparent that he did not fear Jane's desertion. He took Southward around the circle of Jane's friends. As at every other social occasion which Southward had attended in New York, there were an astonishing number of pretty women, charmingly dressed and full of interesting conversation; an equal number of men, not so carefully dressed perhaps but with equal powers for social entertainment. As usual too, there was a celebrity or two. Here as elsewhere, their rallying of Dwight took the form of reproaches for non-attendance at this party or that. Dwight met them all with his customary good nature, his normal slangy, witty volubility. They did not stay long however.

"I just wanted you to see the three types," he explained when they came out. "The writer, the publisher, and the go-between. It's very typical of New York."

"Is Miss Yates a typical middleman?" Southward asked.

Dwight laughed enjoyingly. "Jane is scarcely a typical anything. She was left a widow with a little girl eight years ago. Most women I think would have depended on their beauty to help them out. But Jane's a good business woman—she meets you man to man and no funny business. She's awfully handsome, isn't she?"

"Stunning!" Southward did not speak for a while. "All New York women seem to be handsome," came out of her meditations after a while. "Aren't they the most attractive women you ever saw?"

"Yes and no," Dwight answered. "Of course looks make a lot of difference here—and clothes. New York women doll up, it seems to me, more than any women I ever saw except the Parisians. But sometimes, it's the clothes, not the women themselves. Of course though, there are many really beautiful women here. Jane's one. Azile's another. Kathleen Warren is another. Edith too, although she's not exactly to my taste. I'll probably introduce you to twenty real beauties before your visit is over. But it's not New York alone that's breeding them, remember. They're pouring in from all over the country. They come to go on the stage and into the movies, to study art and music, elocution, and God knows what. It's the same in London and Paris. Nevertheless you do get tired of the composite type. Well, I've told you times enough how pretty and fresh the Shayneford girls looked to me when I first got there."

Southward was preoccupied during dinner, which they ate in a Broadway café, full of coloured lights, some of which shot through a huge fountain that filled one corner. Once, she said, "I didn't expect a publisher to be like that either," as though the day had brought more than one surprise.

"Wendell's a great old boy. I'm strong for him," was Dwight's comment on this. And to her next remark, "I can't tell you what a respect I have for a woman so beautiful as Miss Yates who builds up a business like that," "Yes, you're right. You'll see a lot of that here."

He did not appear to notice her preoccupation. He kept up a flowing commentary on the people in the café, some of whom he recognised. He invited her comment. Gradually he drew her to her highest point of sparkling impudence. "Gee,

Southward, you have a fresh point of view," he remarked once.

"Do you dine out every night?" Southward questioned, ignoring the compliment.

"Every night," Dwight answered. "Often of course with John or Morena. Sometimes somebody that my work compels me to feast and banquet. But more often it's a girl. I do like a girl for dinner."

Southward's preoccupation returned momentarily. But the mad after-dinner round which with the remark, "*Now we're going to have a good time,*" Dwight immediately whirled her, soon broke it up. They stopped first in an uptown café and danced for an hour. Then they went to a downtown café and danced for two hours. Everywhere Dwight ran into acquaintances. Everywhere he was reproached for non-attendance at this party or that, urged to attend new ones, bespoken for dinners or week-end excursions. Dwight poured out voluble explanations for his truancy; accepted fresh invitations on all sides. Towards midnight, they drifted down to Washington Square, walked laughing and talking through the Park.

"Perhaps we'd better be starting towards home," Southward said finally.

"Not yet," Dwight pleaded. And then suddenly as though struck with a new idea, he stepped into the gutter and collected a handful of pebbles. Moving out into the middle of the street, he began to bombard a second-story window on the south side. Presently the sash went up; the curtains parted, and there appeared over the sill a little white face diminished to a mere wafer by great falling clusters of golden curls; a little white hand holding a kimono together over slim child-like shoulders.

"Get up and dress, Cynthia," Dwight coaxed. "I'll take you over to the Balzac and buy you a drink. Besides, there's a nice girl down here that I want you to know."

"Dwight Cameron," Cynthia answered in a piercing stage-whisper, "I could certainly kill you at this moment. I've planned for three days to get the big sleep to-night and here you come along and ruin it. However for the nice girl's sake, I'll forgive you. I'll be down in a jiff."

"Cynthia is a model," Dwight answered Southward's inquiring look, "and a true Peruvian. I think you'll like her. Let's sit down on the doorstep. It won't take her long."

Dwight's prophecy was justified. In a surprisingly brief interval the door back of them opened. There stood on the threshold a

little slim, white-faced girl, dressed all in white, white corduroy-suit, white tam-o'-shanter and, in spite of the wintry cold, white silk stockings and low white shoes. The only colour in all this was the faint gold of her short hair which flew from under the tam-o'-shanter in great streaming masses as of wiry light and the big eyes whose quick glances were like violet arrows.

"I had to put on a summer suit, because I couldn't find my winter one," she explained irascibly, shaking hands with Southward without waiting for Dwight's introduction and ignoring it when it came. "Of course I'm the most heedless person in the world. I know that as well as anybody. But I really can't see where a big thick suit that I've been wearing all day could have disappeared to while I was sleeping."

Southward laughed. "I can understand your state of mind perfectly," she admitted. "I'm not a very careful person myself." Abstraction vanished completely. But in the surreptitious scrutiny to which, as in the case of all the young and beautiful of her own sex, she immediately subjected Cynthia, there was an element of sympathetic understanding.

They crossed the Square to a side street and entered the Balzac, a famous French hotel of the neighbourhood. The cabaret was crowded with tiny tables, set as close together as possible. A few people were eating and all were drinking. Chess, dominoes, cards, cribbage—strange foreign games of various sorts—were going on at many tables, letter-writing at a few. Their advent was greeted with applause from two directions. Dwight waved a general greeting to his friends and established the two girls at a table on the side. But before she sat down, Cynthia went about from group to group, and explained in careful detail how she happened to be wearing a summer suit.

"She never is dressed like anybody else," Dwight was in the meantime humorously explaining to Southward, "although she always seems to think she would be, if it weren't for some unforeseen accident. She's an original and a clever little party altogether. Great fun always." He proceeded to relate some of the most purple incidents in Cynthia's irresponsible career.

The subject of this biography returned in time to their table. But she left it at intervals to join other parties or to invite them to join her. Their table was constantly growing and diminishing in size as other tables were added to it or snatched away. Cynthia rapidly became the social centre of the room. Everybody who entered seemed to see her first; everybody who went out said good-bye to her last. She was one of those people who fill the

stage whatever they do, or wherever they go. The café began to empty. Cynthia departed abruptly at the end of an hour with a group who were going in her direction.

"I think I'm going to bed now," she said, "but I never can tell."

At the door she paused. "Oh, Dwight," she called, "there's a pair of your pyjamas over at my place. I wish you'd come and get them some time."

Dwight joined in the scream of laughter that this evoked.

"She brought them home from a camping party where I left them. She was visiting there the same time I was," he explained to Southward. "Isn't she an imp? It's just as likely she's been hatching that up the whole evening. Still she's quite as spontaneous as she is premeditated. That's why she's such a wonder."

"Did you have a good time, Southward?" Hester called from her room when Southward got in that night.

"Wonderful!" Southward answered. She came into Hester's room and sitting on the bed gave her a detailed account of the night's adventures. But she was visibly preoccupied. An unexpressed undercurrent of comment ran briskly through her mind parallel with her narrative. Hester fell rapidly back to sleep again when Southward finished. But Southward herself sat for a long time at her window, her eyes fixed on the stars. When finally she went to bed, it was on a sudden impulse, as though, after a long and careful consideration of many things, she had come to a clear conclusion.

CHAPTER XIII

IN the morning when Southward called Morena on the telephone, she lingered to talk a little.

"Oh, by the way," she concluded with the air of one who suddenly remembers something, "you know that exhibition of pictures you spoke of a few days ago? I find I can go to-day after all. Another engagement has been called off—— Thanks—— Yes, that's all right—yes—four o'clock then."

Immediately afterwards she called another number.

"Is this Mr. Horne? Oh, good morning. You don't remember me, I'm sure. But I remember you perfectly. Do you recall a girl who met you at the Quatre-Arts' costume-party—she wore a plain scarlet domino? You wanted to know her name and address. And she gave you one, I've forgotten which. Oh, I see you do remember. Oh—I'm sure you're exceedingly kind. Thank you. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Oh, I'd like that awfully. After the theatre? Oh, yes, I see. That makes it only the more interesting. Oh, yes, I'll remember. Saturday night then. Good-bye."

She called a third number.

"I want Mr. Ely. Yes. Is this Mr. Ely. No, Mr. George Ely. Thank you. Oh, good morning, Mr. Ely. I'm that girl you met at the Quatre-Arts' ball—do you remember—in a scarlet domino—and you tried very hard to get me to give you my name and address and I did give you one of them, though I've forgotten which one. Well, here I am—— Oh, I see—well, my name is Southward Drake. Oh, that's awfully kind of you. I'd enjoy it enormously. Thanks, yes. No. Yes, oh, yes. Thank you. All right, Thursday night about ten. Good-bye."

She did not see Dwight again for the rest of the week, although he called her once a day and sometimes twice on the telephone. He was, he explained, exceedingly busy on the novel. "Jane sort of jacked me up the other day, and I'm working hard. Azile is helping me every morning. You see I want to get the first book finished before I read it to Jane."

It happened that the next time she met Dwight was at the party to which George Ely took her. Southward had not, of course,

met the people who gave the party; nor for that matter had Ely more than once. They were a young married pair, actors. They had just received the notice that the building in which they lived was to be torn down at the beginning of the month. They had moved out their Lares, leaving the rooms quite empty, for dancing. Delicatessen food, drinks of all descriptions were spread out on newspapers, on window-sills and radiator-tops. They ate from paper plates and drank from tin cups. Those who wished to sit down between dances sat on newspapers on the floor. It was of course in these circumstances an unusually successful and a wildly hilarious party. And when at midnight a trio of new guests presented themselves in shirts, overalls, and soft felt hats, which they explained they had hired from some labourers working on the street, and carrying the picks and dinner-pails that went with them, they were greeted with uproarious applause. Someone suggested that, as the house was coming down the next day, they might begin the work of destruction at once. This idea was received with cheers. The joyous work began at once. With picks, they attacked the walls which divided the two rooms. Everybody was compelled to take a hand in this fatiguing, dirty, but agreeable task. In half an hour there was a man-size hole cut from room to room; the air was full of dust, the floor covered with débris. After a general washing up—soapless and with handkerchiefs performing the functions of towels—everybody went to a nearby all-night Broadway restaurant. The people sitting at the tables surveyed the mad group of revellers, headed by what purported to be three street-labourers, with interest but without surprise; the waiters received the picks and dinner-pails and carried them off to be checked without a change of expression.

When Southward and Ely invaded this party, Dwight was dancing with Azile alone in the centre of the room. Dwight's glance, falling on Southward, lit with a delighted surprise which died as it shifted to Ely. He bowed with the utmost cordiality to them both, however. The next dance found him at Southward's side. He managed to prolong it interminably by himself renewing the record every time it threatened to run down. Presently united protest affected a change in music and he released her to Ely.

"Ely's a good fellow, isn't he?" he said carelessly. "I didn't know you knew him particularly."

"I don't," Southward answered with an equal carelessness. "Yes, I like him. He's been very kind about offering to take me about."

Ely engaged the next three dances and Southward encouraged him to prolong them by much approval of the music. She danced with the other men that he introduced and twice again with Dwight. But she submitted to all Ely's attempts to monopolise her. She walked with him in the procession that marched a block to the restaurant and she fell in with his suggestion not to separate while eating. Dwight and Azile sat opposite them at the long table which the waiters immediately made from three small ones. The quartette engaged in general conversation, which Ely quite frankly broke off again and again to diminish to a tête-à-tête with Southward.

He was a newspaper-man; full of narrative and lively repartee. He had come to New York two years before, from Yale. But his college atmosphere still hung over him a little; in his metropolitan vocabulary were still embedded the slang exotics of the Yale campus. He was big, blond, and rather ugly. But his eye was clear, his smile winning; he kept a look of athletic freshness.

Southward left before Azile. "By the way," Dwight said in a low voice as he shook hands with her in parting, "I'm going to telephone you sometime to-morrow. I think it's about time we went on another spree."

"All right," Southward assented indifferently.

When as usual she called Morena up the next morning, to her surprise, Dwight answered her gay, "Time to get up, Morena!" with an abrupt:

"This isn't Morena. It's me. Morena's struggling with a telegram at the door."

"Oh, good morning." Southward's composure was unshaken. "How surprising to hear your voice. Well, tell Mr. O'Reilly that I waked him as usual. Good——"

"Say! Wait a moment!" Dwight remonstrated. "What's your rush? I want to talk with you. I want to ask you something. Can you go out to dinner with me to-night?"

"I can," Southward said slowly, "if you can get me home by eleven o'clock. I have an engagement at half-past eleven."

"Is it a long one?"

"Till after two, I fancy."

"Can I deliver you at your party?"

"I'm afraid not. There's a man coming to the apartment for me."

"All right. Curse him. However, I'll tire you out so you won't have any fun with him."

"I challenge you to do that."

"I accept." Dwight paused. "Don't ring off!" he warned her. "I haven't finished yet. It seems as though I hadn't seen you for a dog's age. But I've been very busy myself—writing every morning on the novel and all day yesterday. I feel as if I'd imposed on Azile, but she's been awfully good about helping me."

There was a new note in Dwight's arrogant voice, as though apology tried to veil itself in explanation.

"Well," Southward said, "I must get back to my coffee. Oh, by the way, congratulate Mr. O'Reilly for me. Tell him, please, that I call his attention to the fact that this is the first time in three weeks that I've found him awake when I called him up."

She went to dinner with Dwight, and although in an exaggerated spirit of burlesque entreaty he tried to make her cut out the other engagement, she steadfastly refused to do it. She made no confidence as to its nature, but when Dwight asked point-blank she said that Harold Horne had asked her to go to a private view of a moving picture which starred a Broadway favourite. This view was to be given after midnight in order that the star might himself see it.

"You'll enjoy that," Dwight prophesied, "there'll be some entertaining people there."

Southward admitted that she expected this. And in point of fact, it was more interesting even than she anticipated. Harold Horne was, he told her, a Native Son of the Golden West, Sutter Parlour Number 73. He was big and handsome, with the face of a Greek god, a little too full as to feature and a little too high as to colouring. He had the Californian's wit and resourcefulness. He affected the pose of the raw Westerner in New York for the first time; he referred to metropolitan conditions in the terms of a mining camp. He saw to it that Southward met the entire party in the little velvet-hung room in which the pictures were shown. Her own audacity of spirit re-enforced his social adroitness; there was not a dull moment all the evening long.

CHAPTER XIV

SOUTHWARD's interests were not all personal; she developed others that were more general. She kept her promise to Angela Ade in regard to suffrage work. Occasionally she accompanied that determined young woman on a speaking expedition. Carrying a soap-box, Angela stopped on these occasions first at one corner, then at another, and delivered her talk. "You stand in front of me, Miss Drake," were her brisk commands, "and look as much like an interested audience as you can. The hardest part of it all is to start off haranguing empty space." Southward did not serve as audience long. First one listener joined her; then another. They came by twos and threes. Once within earshot, Angela held them easily enough; she was quick, succinct, logical, and entertaining. Regularly two afternoons a week, Southward sold copies of *The Equal Franchise* on the street. In this she was peculiarly successful and she made no effort to conceal her enjoyment of the process. The touch-and-go contact with the Fourteenth Street crowds brought out all her facility for repartee. Many men stopped to buy of her. With some, motives were obviously mixed; they were inclined to linger and talk. But Southward gave them short shrift. Even more than this suffrage work, she enjoyed a brief picketing experience in an East Side strike. Four times a day, once early in the morning, twice at noon, and late in the afternoon, she reported for duty at the Strike Hall. She accompanied bands of pickets to the shops. She proved so self-controlled, resourceful, and fearless that once she was sent to help "pull" a shop. She came home from these various experiences bursting with narrative. Hester listened with interest. But Southward had no argument cogent enough to get her into these stirring activities.

Southward's intimacy with Mrs. Morrow grew. Soon after their arrival, Azile invited both Hester and Southward to a dinner given at her house. Twenty guests sat down to table. With the exception of their hostess, of Dwight and Morena, the country-girls were the only people present not celebrities. Southward was placed between a famous playwright and a famous actor, Hester between

a famous painter and a famous novelist. For the decoration of the main room in the House-Stable, Azile had apparently robbed the Shop-Stable of its greatest treasures. Old French furniture in a delicately-carved white wood, upholstered in a faded, silvery, grey-blue, seemed to lead the eye as through a silvery, grey-blue vista to the single picture—a Nattier, grey and blue and silvery too. All the glass and all the silver on the bared old-oak table was old. Not a piece of china appeared from the beginning of the dinner to the end; nothing but old English pewter. About the room were flowers whose futuristic colours matched the platters of fruit on the table; matched the dinner-cards that found places for the guests; matched the absurd painted wooden toys that entertained them between courses. The conversation was surprisingly nonsensical, considering, Hester afterwards observed, the massed ability there, but it was entertaining and occasionally broke into an affording seriousness. Afterwards scores of people arrived and they danced all night.

This was the beginning of Mrs. Morrow's entertaining. Subsequently, Hester dropped out of the group as her social unfitness for it more clearly manifested itself. But Southward never refused an invitation.

Azile was the pivot of a peculiarly picturesque crowd of people. Idle, attractive, living from hand to mouth, subsisting in a way possible only to adventure-loving youth without many of the necessities of life but with most of the luxuries, it included gifted young painters who had not arrived, handsome young stage-people perennially out of a job, talented young poets and fiction-writers who had found neither themselves nor a publisher; illustrators, newspaper-men, movie-actors, students of the arts; and the usual fringe of ne'er-do-weel, happy-go-lucky nondescripts all personality and problematical ability which such a crowd inevitably attracts. Constantly shifting in make-up, it remained constantly interesting. Azile's place was the rallying-spot for these agreeable drifters. They appeared there at any instant of the day or night; stayed for hours or days. Azile's amused tolerance of their vagaries was only equalled by Mrs. Boardman's cynical indifference to them. There was of course much haphazard, helter-skelter entertaining going on all the time in the little stable which the two women inhabited. And sometimes this crystallised into a tea or a dinner-party which, at its beginning at least, was characterised by a more formal elegance.

Temperamental, pleasure-loving, restless, of an extraordinary bodily activity, a creature of the night, Azile could not be alone.

But with her, the impulse to hospitality took unexpected forms; came at unexpected times. Sometimes the early morning—or at least what was early morning for New York—would find her at the country-girls' door ready to bear them off to some hastily-improvised jaunt. Sometimes late in the evening the telephone would bring her staccato exigent command to a hastily-improvised party. Once, Southward and Hester were summoned from their very beds to find at her place, equally sleepy-eyed, all the members of the Shayneford camp-group, plus new and interesting aliens. The country-girls never said no to these invitations.

As the winter wore on, costume-party succeeded costume-party. Some of them occurred in the House-Stable, but the majority of them were huge public dances, given by this crowd of artists or that, the socialists, the anarchists, the feminists, etc., *ad infinitum*. These occasions were always preceded by a dinner-party of a specially selected crowd with Azile. At nine—or thereabouts—they ate; at twelve—or thereabouts—they appeared at the dance. Everybody wore fresh costumes to each of these affairs; indeed the invitations stipulated epochs or styles or even colours. Their group planned its clothes with an eye to harmonising or contrasting effects. Once they went as a band of circus-performers; another time as gipsies; again as magazine-cover people; as vaudevillists; futurists; once in yellow and red. An Arabian Nights' fête brought out all their originality in rich colour; a Greek wine-festival all their ingenuity in graceful drapery. Hester never attended these affairs but Southward went to them all. She was often put to it to devise appropriate costumes; for her talents did not lie in that direction. But with the help of the suggestions given her by the painters in their crowd and the assistance of Hester's slight dressmaking gift, she was always a congruous and a startling figure, often a beautiful one. Azile of course wore the most daring of invented costume effects. She went to any end to achieve results—even to staining her whole body brown, when at the Egyptian masque, she went bare-armed and bare-legged as a syce.

Occasionally Azile, Southward, Dwight, and Morena formed parties by themselves. But though they played assiduously at the game of enjoyment, as New York plays it, dinners, theatres, late suppers and later dancing, these *parties carrés* were never successful. Azile alone seemed to enjoy them completely. Perhaps that was because they were invariably run to suit her. If before she arrived she had not planned them, she began to do so as soon as the four were assembled. The men of course always fell

in with her suggestions and Southward never opposed them. Although Azile managed, with an appearance of impartiality, to talk at the theatres and to dance afterwards at the cafés first with Dwight and then with Morena, it was always Dwight who was scheduled to call for her and to take her home. Dwight invariably grew more and more silent as the evening passed; sometimes his mood deepened until it approximated moroseness. Southward maintained that impassivity which, without the break of a single smile, she could sustain for hours. Next to Azile, Morena seemed to extract the most enjoyment from the situation. A sardonic smile always hovered back of the jetty moustache. And his spirits took a definite leap upwards when the two couples parted and he and Southward started on the tête-à-tête walk which always concluded the evening.

That first engagement with George Ely had led to another, and that in turn had led to others. Harold Horne's hospitality had also sent out roots and rootlets. Southward continued to accept Morena's invitations. It began to happen more and more often that when Dwight tried to make an engagement with her, she was already booked. The result was that Dwight began to demand more and more of her time. He began occasionally to take her on his assignments. As the weeks went by—his assignments being rather special in character—this happened often. It was quite apparent that he found Southward entertaining. But more than this, her comments on New York life seemed to stimulate his imagination, especially in regard to his newspaper-work. He found her notably helpful in the "Sunday stuff" by means of which he added regularly to his income. He had long ago begun his series, "What the Country-Girl Saw." His invitations came often with very little warning; as his assignment developed into one on which, with propriety, he could take a woman. On these occasions, the telephone would ring towards noon and his voice, curt, business-like, would say, "Are you free to-day? If so, I can take you on a story!"

"Yes," Southward answered immediately.

"All right. Meet me——"

It was always a different meeting-place, and there would follow his quick concise directions. Southward frankly admitted that she enjoyed these events more than anything that had happened to her in New York. Much of Dwight's work was light. He had discovered a character on the East Side whose dialectic peculiarity was peculiarly humorous. Many of his stories took the form of interviews with this naïve, inarticulate and bewhiskered alien.

To him Dwight pinned every humorous tale of the Ghetto which came to his notice. But often his assignment was more serious. Together they investigated a haunted house which was bringing terror into a correct upper West Side neighbourhood; traced the wanderings within the limits of Manhattan of a cow named Isabel, who suddenly deserted bed and board and refused to return to domesticity until her calf arrived; a gang of little-boy burglars who dumped their booty into a cave on the outskirts of the borough; a pair of spiritualist mediums who had established a new relation with the other world by a process discovered by them in Afghanistan. Once for three days in succession it was a mysterious murder in the Bronx. Southward inspected the house where the girl lived, the shop where she worked; traversed the road which she had followed four times a day, for two years, examined the spot in the bushes where her dead body was found. This involved, for Southward, long lonely periods of waiting while Dwight was getting news in the police-station, but she never complained. In fact, she did a little amateur detective work on her own account. As much as she could, she talked with people in the neighbourhood about the case. Dwight listened with interest to her comments on all these things.

"I like your brain, Southward," he said often, or "I like the kind of thinking you do," or "It's curious how much alike our minds work!"

Often these expeditions ended in quick luncheons in whatever neighbourhood they happened to find themselves; little restaurants, often of the hole-in-the-wall type. Dwight professed to hate cheap places, but Southward enjoyed them more than the expensive ones. Oftener, however, Dwight would have to leave her at once to return to the office and write the story. At first he showed her, in print, the influence here and there of her definite opinions and her concrete comments; but gradually he became unconscious of her influence. Increasingly, however, his newspaper-work was the result of a collaboration.

After a while he read to her what he had written of the new East Side novel. As in the case of the uncompleted Cape Cod novel, Southward's comments were few, brief, and evasive. Apparently this piqued Dwight. He was always trying to draw her to a fuller criticism. Finally he succeeded and Southward delivered what for her amounted to a harangue.

"I feel the same way about this novel that I did about the one you began last summer in Shayneford. It's awfully well-written; gay, spirited, witty, full of colour—it's entertaining. But some-

how it lacks something—perhaps it's what literary critics call 'atmosphere.' But I really think it goes deeper than that. It's not characterised. It's awfully hard for me to talk about it without telling you all the truth. The people in the Cape Cod novel weren't Cape Cod people at all. If it had been written from the point of view of a stranger, perhaps that would have been all right. But you made your hero a man who was born on the Cape and had never left it and you let him tell part of the story in the first person." She paused and smiled. "I don't use long words often but I'm going to use one now; so be prepared for the shock. I should say that the trouble with that novel is that it isn't homogeneous. And I feel the same way somehow about this East Side one. It is as entertaining as the Dickens but I have a feeling that you don't really know what you're talking about."

"Damn you!" Dwight said with mingled chagrin and amusement. "Of course you're right. But I do want to go on with it," he continued in a tone that seemed to plead with her for encouragement. "Why, just think," and now that pleading carried an undercurrent of shame, "I've got two other unfinished novels besides these two. There's one about the Tenderloin and another that's a kind of international affair—begins in the West—jumps to Tangiers—and then to Paris." He paused and glanced with a sideways mischief at his companion. "I'm going to make you read them all some day."

"I feel that coming," Southward announced in a resigned tone.

"Damn you again!" Dwight exclaimed. "Well, anyway, I'm a good reporter."

"You are that," Southward said with conviction, "you're a cracker-jack. I love your stories. I look for them the first thing every morning and I can always tell your style even when I don't know what your assignment was. I think you do the best writing in the New York papers—so simple and clear and vigorous—and yet with such a sense of humour."

"Thanks!" Dwight drawled, "I'm eating up dose woids."

His spirits, which had visibly sunk during this colloquy, now seemed to bound until they struck the zenith of his elastic powers of enjoyment.

CHAPTER XV

MUCH as Dwight enjoyed his assignments, especially after he began to share them with Southward, he looked upon them of course as work. But he threw himself into his play. It was apparent soon that though one side of him frankly enjoyed a wildly hilarious party, there was another side which quite as frankly enjoyed the correct side of metropolitan existence. He liked to get into evening clothes; call for Southward in a taxi to bear her, also in evening clothes, to dinner at Sherry's or Delmonico's. Afterwards they went to the theatre or to the opera, although neither of them cared particularly for music. He liked—that was amusingly apparent also—to escort a woman whose looks and appearance attracted attention; elicited admiration. Ultimately this involved Southward in the purchase of two new evening gowns. She bought the materials, after an examination of the models in the Fifth Avenue shop windows, in a department-store on Broadway. They were made into a simplified translation of those models with the assistance at home of a little dressmaker who lived in their house. They earned from Edith, a "Southward, I should think you had bought those in Paris!" and from Azile, a flutter of the eyelashes and an ossification of her whole expression before she said, "But they're charming! Where *did* you find them?"

"Wear the orange dress to-night," was Dwight's masculine tribute, or with equal enthusiasm, "Put on that yellow thing with the lace."

At first Dwight made a point—and always he said it was to complete her education—to introduce her singly and in circles to all kinds of people. He seemed to take a special delight in flashing her from place to place, pulling her away immediately however if the occasion threatened to be dull and, before she could catch her breath, darting her into another extraordinary group. He watched always and with a sense of pride for the reaction which her personality immediately produced. Indeed the intrusion of her cold, composed, hard self-assurance, taken with her brilliant vivid beauty, had the effect of a hand-grenade thrown into the midst of those cynical New York crowds. His women-friends were apparently legion and he never lost an opportunity to introduce

her to them. Now at some wild studio-party it was Eileen O'Hearn, a famous movie-star, a vivid pink-and-gold blonde of seventeen, smothered in white furs and wound with pearls. Again, it was a slip of a creature whom he stopped on the Avenue, a tiny brunette with huge half-moon eyes peering at them from under a fur cap and over high Tartar-shaped cheek-bones. "She's the Russian diving-wonder, Katia Karhoff," Dwight explained. "To be sure, her real name's Victoria Hawkins, and she never left England until last year. But isn't she a pippin?" Again it would be a tall blond thoroughbred creature, clothed slimly in coat-of-mail of black leather who stopped her automobile to invite them for a drive through the Park. "That's *Jo Durland—the Jo Durland*," Dwight explained afterwards. "She's showing her famous Airedales at the dog show this week. She's an aviator too—no end of courage and nerve." Or it was a freckled pink-cheeked little girl, shy-eyed and blushing, whose arm he caught and held until he could introduce Southward, "Maisie MacDonald, the Scotch poetess who's been making such a hit in New York this winter. Isn't she a soncy lassie?" And so on and on; competent newspaper-women; working suffragettes; gay society butterflies.

But Dwight was no carpet-knight. He had quite as many men as women-friends, perhaps more. He did not seem so eager to precipitate meeting in their case, however. Introductions were unavoidable of course. Newspaper-men predominated and it was easy to see what Dwight's position with them was; one of those brilliant, easily-successful stars of the newspaper world whom his confrères admired and envied. They liked him too. But everybody liked Dwight.

He himself liked everybody. And he enjoyed life frankly and fully. He had a strong physique, enormous vitality; an undying interest in people and things. He was open-minded and open-hearted. He arose every morning on a fresh world. He lived every day as though it was his first conscious day of maturity; enjoyed each experience as though it were the first taste of life. If he were inclined to drift from one thing to another, more as the result of volitions other than his own, it may be said in his defence that many of his friends worked persistently at the business of snaring this elusive butterfly. He had all the arrogance of young quick success, but he lacked all the offensive phases of egotism. True he talked of his life, his experiences, his intimacies, his ambitions with frankness, but it was a frankness as interesting as it was engaging. Southward listened to everything he told her.

She never asked questions, but she was adept at making the kind of comment that is more successful in eliciting further confidence than the most direct and searching interrogatories.

More and more however as Southward became identified with his work, Dwight tended to avoid big parties, to segregate her at crowded affairs, to take her, on his nights off, where they could be alone. Inevitably, as time went on, there came less frequent allusion to Dora, Jane, Patty, Cynthia, and Kathleen; or to any of the other women to whom he had introduced Southward. But it was apparent that his intimacy with Azile still held. At first he had not alluded to his long writing sessions in the Stable-House. But now he was careful to say, "I'm going up to Azile's Thursday morning to do a chapter." Or, "Sorry that I'm engaged to-morrow now that the weather's so good—I'm due at the Stable-House." Or, "I'm taking Azile off on a little trip to-morrow." He never volunteered any descriptions of these excursions and Southward never made any comment on them. The extra work resulted inevitably in a simpler way of life—earlier to bed and a perceptible falling off in all-night dissipation.

"Southward, you're exerting a fine moral influence on Dwight," John said to her once semi-humorously. "He's keeping a much better pace than last year at this time. Showing you the town is an innocent diversion which has prevented dissipation."

"Thank you, John." The faint glimmer of Southward's mirth made liquid the agate depths of her eyes. "It's the first time I've ever been called an elevating and refining influence. The truth of the matter is that I've been maligned. You're the only man I know who really understands me."

"The moment you hear that that big German oculist, Greinschmidt, has started East," Southward prodded Dwight again and again, "tell me. Because I've got to make a quick hike back to Shayneford."

"What's all this Greinschmidt business about?" Dwight demanded finally.

"I want him to examine Charlotte's eyes. You remember my cousin, Charlotte Howes?"

"Oh, yes," Dwight answered, "perfectly. Extraordinary-looking woman."

"I want to see if her sight can be restored."

"Has she been blind long?"

"About fifteen years. She was blind when she came to live with

us. I've always had a feeling—or at least a hope—that she might be cured. And if anybody can do it, Greinschmidt can."

"He's an expensive beggar," Dwight warned her.

"Yes, I know that," Southward answered. "But I have a little money that my mother left me. Charlotte hasn't anything of course. I'm going to put the whole situation to Greinschmidt and ask him to operate if it's necessary and charge what's fair. I think I've got one thing to tell him that will make him do it." She said this as though for the first time confiding a resolution, newly-made to herself. And as though ink had been infused into her skin a sudden blackness swept over her face.

"Why the fighting-face, O Shayneford Spider?" queried Dwight. "I mean what's the dope?"

"I'm telling that to nobody but Greinschmidt. However I don't worry about him. He's a big person. He'll do it of course."

"Yes, I think he probably will," Dwight agreed. He turned and looked admiringly at Southward's incisive profile. "Gee, you're a corker. You do exactly what you want, don't you?"

"Not exactly," Southward qualified this statement. "But believe me as nearly as it's humanly possible."

Four months had gone by. It was late in February. Although Southward was seeing more of Dwight than at first, she was also seeing more of Morena. Their morning talks over the telephone were now prolonged tête-à-têtes from which Hester always retreated, closing her door behind her. Twice a week at least Southward accepted some hospitality from him. He did not do the sort of thing that Dwight did for her. Morena did not at all care for the superficial formal side of New York life and very little for its professedly bohemian aspect. There was a curious kinship between him and Southward, growing out of an unexpected similarity of tastes. Just as Dwight tended towards the expensive and elegant, Morena gravitated to the simple and characterised. He knew a number of tiny, quiet, out-of-the-way cafés; indeed he had discovered some of them himself. As he had kept his find a secret, these were still likely to be filled with the people who belonged in them.

"This one," he explained to Southward of a café on the West Side in the forties, "is a resort for all the broken-down, out-at-the-elbow nobility of New York. These people sitting here are all barons or counts or marquises, or princes even. If you're one of those American women who yearn for a title—here's your chance—provided you've got the money to pay for it." Or, of a hotel café

in the region of Fourteenth Street, "This is a great place for South Americans. I could write a book on the revolutions that have been plotted here, and as for filibustering expeditions—they couldn't be catalogued." He took her to a French pension where the food, abundant, steaming hot, and delicious, was passed, in foreign style, from hand to hand on huge platters. He took her to Italian restaurants, a German, a Greek, a Syrian, a Hungarian restaurant. The great surprise to her however was the Turkish restaurant—a surprise because she very much enjoyed the strange food, all of which she later told Hester tasted as though it had been perfumed. This, she further said, was a real adventure; for as they entered, "Oh, there are some friends of mine!" Morena exclaimed. "The people at that corner table are all socialists and anarchists. Come, you ought to meet them." They were invited to join this party and ended by spending the evening with it. Southward listened without comment except the unconscious comment of her glimmering eyes to what she afterwards described to Hester as the "wildest bunch of nonsense I ever heard in my life delivered by people who looked as if they were sane."

Their before-dinner diversion took the form of walks by the river or in little out-of-the-way parks, tiny secluded neighbourhood, north or south, which Morena had discovered; their after-dinner entertainment visits to penny vaudeville-houses, movie-shows, the Irving Place Theatre. But perhaps their gayest hours were spent in shooting-galleries. Southward was a good shot and Morena an exceptional one. His exploits always drew an audience which Southward was likely to increase to a crowd. Even the employees of the place gathered when the gay young girl so boyishly slim, so brilliantly handsome, drew the rifle to her shoulder and glanced expertly down its length to the sight. Often the proprietor gave her a complimentary round of shots; she left in the midst of an admiring trail of exclamatives.

Their conversation had during this period a superficial effect of intimacy. And to some extent, their intimacy really deepened. Their kinship in enjoyment made them laugh a great deal. And inevitably those who laugh in company must draw mentally together. Again, Morena paid her many compliments, and although Southward fended them off in the conventional way, it was apparent they did not entirely displease her.

Sometimes Morena added, "I'd say a good deal more of this if you'd let me," or "It's getting pretty hard to hold back the other remarks I'd like to make," or "Southward, you're a provocative creature and, by Jove, I think you know it."

Southward either ignored Morena's remarks, or turned the subject; but she did this with less and less success as the weeks passed.

"I don't like this line of talk," she burst out impatiently once. Whereupon Morena fired for an instant. All that was Latin in him glared from his face. "You don't have to put up with it. You don't have to have me round."

"That is true," Southward retorted with equal spirit. "I must remember it."

"I beg your pardon," Morena said in another moment. "I had no business to say that. Perhaps I'm a little more tired than usual to-day, and sometimes, Southward, you drive me to the point where—— You're a devil of course, and the worst of it is you know exactly what you're doing."

Southward did not answer this. But she waked him up the next morning at the same time.

There was, after this, a change in the atmosphere of their meetings. But only for a little while. Gradually Morena became more and more daring in the expression of his admiration. Southward did not seem to find it so easy either to ignore or deflect it.

She resorted to badinage which increased in extravagance as Morena's complimentary attacks deepened in intensity. An air of wild hectic gaiety hung over their conversation.

Spring came.

It had been a cold winter, though with clear weather and little snow. Gradually the frost went out of the air and a tentative warmth stole into it. The trees and bushes in the little parks began to have a strange look, damp and softly swollen, as though something inside was getting too big for its small compass. Suddenly one day there appeared on those pink-brown boughs a spark here and there of green. The next day that spark was a green flame running close to the bough. A week, and the parks were filled with balloon-shaped green fires. The ivy on the houses dripped green fire cascades. The eye glancing down the filthy brownstone vistas from blue river to blue river caught on what might have been volumes of emerald smoke rolling over yards and between houses. In a few days, the green fire turned to leaves, grass, flowers. Snowdrops came; jonquils, narcissi. In itself, the frowsy old city looked more dusty and greasy than ever. And now in the crowded neighbourhoods, more and more children swarmed into the streets; played among the ash-cans and garbage-pails. Uptown, more and more children beautifully dressed, accompanied by taut,

trim nurses, flooded the grassy hollows of the park; played about the ponds; rode the donkeys; roller-skated. The shop windows burst into displays more frivolous in detail, more voluptuous in effect than ever before. And the people of the city taking the signal from them and perhaps from that green fire whose aromatic odours still burned in the air and possibly from something deeper, keener, and more peremptory in their own hearts, appeared in the latest and maddest caprice of fashion.

The country-girls had responded instantly to the exhilarating call of winter. Their eyes took on a new sparkle, their lips a fresher colour; and as was inevitable, the urban influence showed itself in a more studied grace of costume. As the weeks lengthened to months and the days continued to take their toll of dissipation, they grew a little languid. With the oncoming of spring, the tiny apartment seemed to shrink. Their windows, open in the middle of the day, brought to them the clamour of the street; a strange compound of the cries of playing children, conflicting samples of itinerant music; the roars of neighbouring gramophones; the vociferous call of passing peddlers. There surged up to them all kinds of unpleasant city smells that till now the frost had concealed.

"Gee, it's getting hot and noisy and dirty and smelly," Southward burst out irritably one day.

"Yes," Hester answered, "when you think how heavenly Shayneford is now."

"Goodness, yes—violets—anemones—and every bush a bunch of pink or white or yellow chiffon. And yet, I wouldn't go home for—I'm going to stay just as long as I can—at least until the gang beats it. How do you feel, Hester?"

"I don't ever want to go home. I'd stay all summer, I don't care how hot it gets, or if everybody we knew left town. That is if the money would only hold out. Why, Southward, I can't tell you how I feel. I look upon this life here as the interval between two jail sentences. Oh, you don't know. Nobody knows. I can't tell anybody because I can't tell myself." Hester had begun with her usual simplicity and with the increased oral smoothness and articulateness that happiness had given her. But she ended in a kind of wildness.

"Sometimes I go to that window," she continued, "and look out on that streetful of dirty, impudent little street-brats yelling insolence and profanity to each other and anybody who happens to be passing, and I drink the sight of it down as though it was the picture I most want to see in all the world—Botticelli's *Spring*."

"Well, we've certainly got a bad attack of New Yorkitis, both of us," Southward remarked, as usual resolving Hester's intensity by her humorous directness.

Southward had a dinner engagement that night with Morena. But just before she started, Dwight telephoned to her. Their conversation was prolonged.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, interrupting lightness with seriousness, "Hester and I have been talking future plans to-day and, for the first time since we've come here, we're admitting to each other that there's such a place as home. We even allowed as how the time must come when we shall have to leave this glorious burg. For one thing, money—drat it—will give out. And for another, you don't stay all summer long in a big city. By the way," she concluded as though just struck with the thought, "what are you people going to do?"

"I don't know exactly," Dwight answered. "Azile and I were talking about it the other day. Of course I'm strong for Shayneford, but she isn't. You know how restless she is; it's always 'green fields and pastures new' for her. I can't get any opinion one way or the other out of John. He always says, 'whatever the rest of you decide.' Edith's idea is to find a new spot—preferably in the mountains this time—and take you two girls along. Azile seemed to think that as good a plan as any."

"I can't go," Southward decided immediately, "and I'm sure Hester couldn't. It's a matter of money with both of us; and in addition, I have to consider that operation on Charlotte's eyes."

"Well, I shall come to Shayneford anyway," Dwight announced. "Of course I'm not going to throw the crowd down. We've been doing things together three or four years now and that wouldn't be classy. I'm going to Shayneford though—that is if you're there. I'm going to ask for an arrangement to bunch my two days off every other week, and by travelling nights I can get half a week there."

Southward made no comment.

"Don't you want me to come?" he demanded.

"Of course."

"Then show some enthusiasm, please."

Southward said nothing. But her gay laugh, which hanging up the receiver broke off, held plenty of enthusiasm.

Away from the telephone, a wild gaiety seized Southward. That gaiety kept up through her dinner with Morena, held itself at a high note through all their evening together. And perhaps because of it, she relaxed a little the non-committal mood which, for weeks

now, she had tried to sustain toward Morena. She responded to his complimentary sallies with impertinent counter-attacks. She laughed at him and with him. Even when she was silent, smiles that had no apparent reason for being made white flashes in her dark face.

Morena grew quiet as the evening passed, but his eyes never left her. It was as though she were showing a new side to him and yet a side more bewitching than any he had yet seen. Instead of saying good-bye when she opened the inner door, he stepped with her into the dimly-lighted inner hall. As she turned her face inquiringly towards him, he slipped an arm about her.

The powerful jerk to which he subjected her brought her head to his shoulder. Before she could raise it, he kissed her once—twice—short fierce kisses—then a long kiss.

For that long instant Southward was quiet, a dead weight in his arms. Then she became lightning; a jungle-cat. She tore herself loose and struck at him. He evaded a blow that was aimed at his cheek. It grazed his shoulder. She retreated backwards to the stairs.

"How dare you—how dare you?" she raged, "when I told you that other time—that you must never—if you ever——"

Morena was however perfectly composed by this time.

"I ought to apologise, Southward," he said gravely, "and I do. But in your heart, you know you are as much to blame as I."

Southward did not answer. She fled blindly up the stairs, at first with a queer staggering gait; in the end with a speed that gradually attained directness. Hester did not speak when she opened the door; she lay sleeping quietly, the moonlight making a pale glory of her hair. Southward ran to her room; threw herself face downwards on her bed; lay there until the strange shaking of her body subsided.

She did not call Morena on the telephone the next morning. But he called her; apologised humbly, concluding with an entreaty for her not to break off their morning talks. She accepted this apology.

CHAPTER XVI

BUT later in the day Southward's spirits began to rise. And when, towards night, Dwight called her up with an invitation to frivolity, she had reached another high point of gaiety. That high point maintained itself during dinner and over into the rather dull party which they attended. There was no particular reason why the party should be dull, Dwight pointed out to her. It was held in the "village" and included the cream of the "villagers." "I suppose," he added, "everybody's so blooming brilliant that the light is too dazzling—result as ruinous as though everybody were dull. Too bad though!"

"I don't care," Southward declared, "I feel as happy as—I'm having the time of my life. I don't know why exactly."

"So am I," said Dwight. And his spirits perfectly matched hers. "But I know why. It's because the right girl is here. You make my good time, Southward."

Southward did not speak but stood immobile for an interval, her eyes raised to his. Dwight did not speak either and he continued to stare down into her eyes. They rested thus an instant in the little alcove to which they had retreated from the dancing, Southward exchanging her glimmer for Dwight's sparkle.

"Gee, you are stunning to-night," Dwight said finally. "I never saw you look so—you're a blazing oil-well. You mustn't get too pretty—you make it too hard for a man."

Unaccountably he became silent after this; grave, *distrain*, moody. The party began to diminish in numbers. Presently there were only a score left. Somebody proposed that they should go to an uptown, all-night café. They started.

It was very late. The cars were infrequent, pedestrians occasional; taxis absent. Walking up Seventh Avenue, the crowd suddenly turned as gay as though the party had been a complete success. Perhaps it was the infection of Southward's spirits. She started them playing games. "Ring Around a Rosie," "London Bridge is Falling Down," "Snap the Whip." For blocks, they met nobody but a policeman who watched their progress without surprise, but with an air of judicial appraisal, and a friendly drunk who, while clinging to a lamp-post for needed support,

earnestly besought them to take him along. Southward was the head and front of all this. She was wearing the short white evening gown that she had brought from Shayneford. She had taken off her coat, as the night was comparatively warm, had handed it to Dwight. But about her white figure there floated a huge square of thinnest chiffon which shaded from pale yellow to deep orange, through flame colour to scarlet. She wore gold stockings and gold slippers.

As they neared Forty-second Street, Southward fell to the rear, tailed the fluttering gay-plumaged line; danced alone. Behind, at a distance appropriate for his amused observation, came Dwight. At the corner stood a group of men, drivers apparently of the taxis which lined the sidewalk. As Southward dropped from the dance to the quick walk which brought her to the rest of the sobered party, one of the taxi-drivers dropped a remark, obviously made for her benefit.

"What was that?" Dwight demanded peremptorily.

The man wheeled but, though apparently surprised, repeated his remark after an instant of indecision.

Dwight came forward swiftly, his fists up. The crowd parted, not to permit freedom to the fighters but to attack Dwight in unison. Dwight stepped back lightly to a point where the wall guarded his rear.

Southward had crossed the street. She turned back for Dwight. By this time he had engaged all four of his assailants. He was half a head taller than the tallest, and palpably a trained boxer. Southward stood a poised and paralysed instant, taking in the situation. In that instant, one of Dwight's opponents dropped into the gutter. He lay there.

Southward's paralysis broke. She sped like a flash of lightning across the street. As she reached the sidewalk, a second of Dwight's antagonists reeled backwards. As though involuntarily, her fist came out in passing and so accelerated the impulse Dwight had given him that he fell. He was not definitely knocked out like the first, but he was dazed. He raised himself on his hands and stupidly contemplated the fight.

The remaining two were not such easy prey. Still Dwight fought briskly, master of the situation. And as his body moved in ever so tiny a radius avoiding blows, as his arms plunged forward delivering them, and as he ducked and countered and side-stepped, his face was white with fury. But ever he smiled. His smile was a smile of absolute enjoyment; and yet there was something sinister in it. Southward stood at a little distance and watched. She

did not move or speak; immobile as iron; keenly watchful yet quiveringly ready to act.

The whole affair ended suddenly. A policeman appeared around the corner and pulled the two drivers backwards by their collars.

"What's all this about?" he demanded gruffly.

"Nothing, officer," Dwight answered crisply. "These men made a remark about this lady as she was passing and I punched them—that's all."

"What's your name?"

"Cameron of the *Planet*." Dwight fished for a card.

The policeman studied them all with impartial suspicion, glanced at the card. "Do you want to make any complaint?" he asked.

"No," Dwight replied, "I'm satisfied."

He straightened his clothes out, picked up Southward's coat which he had thrown to one side. "Good night, officer."

Their party had disappeared. Dwight and Southward walked in silence across Forty-second Street. Then Dwight hailed a passing taxi; helped Southward in. His face had turned a deep purple-crimson.

"Your cheek is cut a little," Southward said with composure. With her handkerchief she wiped the blood off.

"Yes, the little dark one got to me. He could box—and, believe me, that punch rocked me some." Dwight did not speak for an interval and Southward made no remarks. She continued however to wipe the blood away until it ceased to come. Dwight did not seem to notice her ministrations. He looked straight ahead until that swift sinister purple-coloured wrath ebbed by degrees away.

"What became of the rest of the gang?" he asked.

"I don't know; I suppose they think we dropped out and went home."

"You were great, Southward," he said, after another pause, "I don't suppose there's one girl in a thousand who wouldn't have complicated matters by screaming or crying or fainting. I caught sight of you out of the tail of my eye as you came running across the street. You looked like a saint or a fury or an Amazon—I don't know what—with that flame-coloured scarf streaming out back and those shining slippers. You didn't seem to run—you flew."

He relapsed into sombre meditation as one of the recurrent waves of emotional fury carried him off again.

"You hit one of them, didn't you?" he emerged from it again.

"The second," Southward answered succinctly.

She added nothing. And Dwight did not speak for another block.

Then suddenly his arm shot out as though it were delivering a different kind of blow. He pulled Southward over to him so that her head fell on his shoulder. She did not resist. They sat thus until she got home.

There, Dwight scarcely spoke. He helped her out of the taxi with rather an absent air; bade her a grave good night; left immediately.

The next morning, Dwight called her on the telephone early.

"That German gink you're so interested in—Greinschmidt—is in Boston now. He arrived last night and is going to stay a week."

"Only a week!" Southward exclaimed. "Only a week?" she repeated. "Well, that means I've got to go over to Boston to-day then. I'll take the ten o'clock limited."

"To-day—this morning!" Dwight ejaculated. "Lord, I won't have a chance to see you then. I'm waiting now for a guy who's sailing for Europe at nine. I've just sent my card up. Can't you put it off till to-morrow or till three this afternoon?"

"No," said Southward with instant decision, "I can't. You see if I go this morning, I'll be in Shayneford to-night. Then I can get Charlotte up to Boston to-morrow morning. Of course there'll be everything to contend with—Greinschmidt so busy that I'll have to fight my way to him—Charlotte frightened to death and the rest of the family worried—— What's his hotel?"

Dwight told her.

"I'm going to long-distance at once and see if I can make an appointment."

"Yes. That's the thing to do. Then I shan't see you for—— How long will you be gone?"

"Probably not over a week, ten days or so. I'll take Charlotte home as soon as possible. I'll get Sue-Salome Hatch to come up and help me take care of her."

"A week seems like an awful long time," Dwight said. "I can't seem to see New York without you in it, Southward. There was something I was going to tell you before you left." He paused. "But I think probably you know what it was."

Southward did not speak. They were both silent.

"Good-bye, Southward."

"Good-bye, Dwight."

Southward stood at the telephone for an interval after she hung up, her arm over her eyes, leaning against the wall. But when she joined Hester at the breakfast-table, her head was thrown back, her mouth smiled, in a rapture of exultation, her eyes——

"Where did you get those stars you're seeing with this morning?" Hester asked playfully.

Southward broke the news of her trip to Shayneford. Hester was at once all interest and sympathy. Southward rushed about the apartment collecting clothes and toilet articles from everywhere, threw them into her big suitcase. But here Hester intervened. She took them all out and carefully repacked them.

CHAPTER XVII

HESTER's experience in New York was, of course, very different from Southward's. She did not attack the city as Southward had, delivering one blow here, another there, tripping it finally so that the huge Colossus fell prone, the victim of untiring initiative and audacity. On the contrary, Hester stood still and let the seething flood of metropolitan existence creep about her until it submerged and bore her off; bore her whither it would into this little eddy of activity, that tiny backwater of quiet; or for a while on yonder smooth current which in the end flowed into one bearing straight ahead. She was perhaps not of the type to make a swift social success anywhere; and certainly not in New York. The welcoming gaiety interested and absorbed her; the masked costume-ball; the party in John's room; Azile's high-coloured temperamental hospitality. But gradually, as her own unfitness for such hectic activity manifested itself, she withdrew from it all. Edith, John, and Ripley touched only the outer rim of this wheel of dissipation; Edith because she was too frail, the men because they were too busy. But they offered Hester plenty of their own simpler forms of enjoyment.

Hester had never seen such a life as Edith led, had never read of one; had not even guessed such lives could be. It seemed made up of long excursions into the art-world by means of art-exhibitions, which she attended in wearisome numbers; long excursions into the book-world by means of the new books, some of them limited expensive editions, which she ordered with a reckless prodigality; interminable wanderings through shops; examining clothes, jewelry, the beautiful stuffs of which she already had a collection that she could not, in any private capacity, use up during a whole lifetime; gathering the antiques which for lack of room she had begun to store.

Many of these expeditions ended in purchases. But these purchases were made after long consideration, many vacillations, and from reasons ultimately so finely spun that they scarcely seemed reasons at all.

Was the object of choice, as once happened, a wedding-gift to a cousin who was marrying the grocer of a little town in the Middle West, the transaction was attended by the same scrupulous care

which she would have shown in the case of the most fastidious artist of her acquaintance. From this shop they went to that shop and on to more shops until Edith found just the quality of old glass that she wanted. This was the more amusing as she had a very definite consciousness that her cousin knew nothing whatever about old glass and might easily prefer a thick, unbeautiful but durable modern variety which to Edith's delicate disgust flooded the market at that time.

"But as I haven't any idea what her taste is except that it is probably bad, I shall undoubtedly not please her whatever I choose. And so why not please myself?" she said to Hester.

Hester's answer was one of her self-evolved bits of philosophy; quiet, gentle but with a suggestion underneath of that something which made people recognise in her, despite her lassitude, her mental hesitations, her social cowardice—a kind of inchoate, undeveloped force.

"Gift-giving is such an art," she elucidated slowly, "that sometimes I feel as though I never wanted to give anybody anything or to have anybody give me anything. Southward and I have made an agreement never to exchange presents. If we could find out what people want—— But often they don't know themselves. The great thing would be to discover what subconsciously they would like and haven't realised yet. But that's almost a career in itself. I suppose if you were to find out that I really wanted, without at all knowing it myself, a hideous coloured chromo, and got it for me, that would be a perfect example of gift-giving."

"I shall never be a perfect giver then," Edith rejoined, laughing, "because I simply cannot make gifts that I don't like myself."

"Well," Hester said, slowly still, as one who reflects, "then I should say in that case you were giving yourself the gift."

"I suppose I am," Edith confessed contritely. "It would be nice though if we could give what were gifts both to ourselves and the other person. In fact," she added lightly, "it just occurs to me that I'm going to give just such a gift now if I'm not much mistaken. Come right up to Tiffany's with me this moment. We're going to get that silver bow and arrow which I designed for you to wear in your hair. It was to be ready to-day. Do you remember that I asked you if I could do that for you?"

"Of course I do," Hester answered. "That is an ideal gift. It is sweet of you, Edith."

"And we'll make a holiday of to-day because it will be the first time you wear it. When I get back I'll call up John and Ripley and ask them to dinner."

The two women proceeded to Tiffany's where the pin, slim and shining, awaited them in a little velvet-lined grey box. It was late in the afternoon and they went home immediately. Just as soon as they arrived, Edith conducted Hester to her bedroom and insisted that she should do her hair over.

"I'll admit that it's something of a job. It would tire me to death to handle those great ropes. But I am wild to see how the pin looks."

Edith stretched herself with a long sigh of weariness on her bed. It was a big, high, canopied affair hung with masses of tea-coloured lace, and an old rose brocade which dropped a faint colour onto Edith's wan face. She banked herself at every point with the cushions that heaped it high, relaxed with a momentary dropping of her eyelids; watched Hester.

Docile as usual, Hester pulled down her braids, which that afternoon were coiled in a great basket at the back of her head, undid them, brushed them out. Perhaps it was the change in the air and atmosphere that, quickening her, in every way, had so enlivened her hair. Its characteristic wiriness had gained a new force, its lustre a new radiance. It poured in lapping floods of molten gold from her head over the back of the low chair in which she sat; heaped itself up on the rose-coloured carpet.

"Fairy-tale princess," Edith accused her, smiling gently.

Hester rose finally to brush and braid her hair. And the slender plaits which she produced had to wind twice about her head before she could catch them together, just above the middle of her brow, with the new brooch.

The silver bow and arrow was a success, as John and Ripley several times told Hester that evening. And as not only they, but Edith, commented again and again on her improved looks, the evening turned into a modest ovation for her.

Edith was the centre of a small, closely intimate circle of friends, strange waifs and strays most of them, which her beauty and charm attracted and her kindness held. The atmosphere of her circle was very different from that of Azile's. Azile lived in a whirlpool. Around her revolved a group of satellites of which the inner group, small and select, was always fixed and the outer group, large and casual, always shifting. Edith's *ménage* was, in comparison, like some quiet forest pool. Her formal entertaining was rare, elaborate, and carefully planned. And though owing to her genuine kindness, her very present interest in her friends, it was never a failure, owing to her lack of force it was often a little dull. It tended to be negative in character. The food at

her dinner-parties, though beautifully cooked and exquisitely served, grew always tepid before it reached the table; and that somehow was typical of her hospitality.

The closest of her friends was Rena Osgood, a trained nurse. She was a woman of about forty, faded, with a something belatedly girlish about her. Her face was pale and lined and yet there was a softness everywhere; a wavy softness in her luxuriant brown hair; a plaintive softness in her deep brown eyes; a pathetic softness in her colourless lips. Originally she might have been as shy as Hester, but ten years of metropolitan experience had sloughed that shyness off. She made definite overtures of friendship to Hester; an occasional invitation to the theatre on her free afternoon; or a bus ride when she was sent on errands by the elderly invalid to whom she seemed as much companion as nurse. Oftenest perhaps she and Hester walked in the Park together. They preferred this because it gave them the best opportunity to satisfy their great common taste—a love of children. Their observations on all occasions were sprinkled with side comments on the children they passed. But in the Park they deliberately chose seats where they could enjoy playing groups.

Miss Osgood's comments were often professional in tone and in consequence tinged with the impatience of an aroused indignation.

"Look at the angle of that carriage shade!" she would exclaim, "the sun is shining straight into the baby's eyes. What a stupid nurse! Now what do you suppose that child's mother would think if she knew its eyes were being ruined? Well, perhaps she's playing bridge and doesn't care what happens as long as she isn't being bothered. Can you imagine yourself, Hester, ever leaving the care of a baby to a girl as ignorant as that?" Or, "Now look at that one. See, she's tacking up that bunch of dangly things just near enough so that the baby's eyes cross every time it looks at them. She couldn't do anything much worse. See what a darling he is too. A regular boy! Look at those big blue eyes and those curls." Or, "And look at that one giving her baby a pacifier. Oh, if I could only get a law passed prohibiting pacifiers." Or, "That one that's just passed is a blue baby. I don't suppose it will live long—poor little thing."

Miss Osgood would intersperse these remarks with long stories about her training and her subsequent professional experiences. She particularly liked maternity cases. She had never grown dull to the wonder of birth; had never ceased to marvel at it. She

always grew fond of the new-born baby and some she had bidden good-bye with real suffering.

"There was a little girl called Margery," she said once, "in the Josephine-Gregory hospital—the Joe-Greg, we always called it—in Los Angeles that I took care of for the first six months of her life. She was a delicate child for a while; didn't seem to digest her food and kept coming back to the hospital for long periods. Her mother wasn't with her of course, and after a while she was very busy having another child and I had almost the complete care of Margery. If I do say it as shouldn't, I made her the strong healthy little girl she is to-day. She was almost like my own child. And oh, she was such a darling! She had to take a nap every morning and afternoon and she used to get all mixed up in time—she never knew which of her naps was night.

"'What day is dis, Miss Osdood?' she'd say after her morning nap.

"I'd answer Tuesday.

"'Is dis still Tooday, Miss Osdood?' she'd ask after her afternoon nap. And she had such cunning little expressions. She couldn't pronounce the hard C or K. At first she always said 'tie' for 'cry' and later 'ky.' When she finally left the Joe-Greg for good and I knew that, except for an accident, she never would come back again, I cried my eyes out. If she had been my own child, I suppose I would have loved her more; but it doesn't seem as if I could. And she loved me. She'd leave her mother for me any time. At first I used to go to see her regularly. And then they went away for a while and when they came back it wasn't the same—her mother was all-in-all to her. Of course I still love her but—I shall never have any children of my own now, and yet I sort of feel as though my life hadn't been lived in vain. Her mother brought little Margery into the world, but it was my care that kept her here."

Miss Osgood's eyes filled as she related this experience; and Hester's eyes grew wet too. Her answer was to tell the story of little Bee, and again Miss Osgood frankly wept.

The two women were soon recognised by the regular habitués of the Park. They made overtures of friendship to nurses as well as children. Soon their appearance was greeted with quiet expressions of welcome from the elders, and vociferous cries of joy from the children. They became popular with the nurses because they frequently joined in the children's games, giving them a chance to gossip uninterruptedly. If the diversion were roller-skating, they helped to teach the amateurs and to curb the boisterousness of the experienced. In snowy weather, they hauled

the babies on sleds, taught them to take tiny coasts by themselves. Hester used to come back from these long open-air sessions with a deep colour much approved by John on the rare occasions that he saw it.

Southward of course scorned these experiences.

"Hester, you certainly are a strange girl," she exclaimed once, "wasting all this beautiful city time on those brats in the Park. What do you do it for?"

"Well, I really enjoy it for one thing," Hester replied. "And then it is a great pleasure for me to look at such beautiful children. They are probably the healthiest babies I have ever seen. Such eyes! Such hair! Such complexions! And they are dressed so sensibly. I declare it's a joy to see children so perfectly equipped for play. You know I love children, Southward. I have been thinking, as I've sat there in the Park watching them, of just the kind of teaching I'd like to do. There must be lots of people living in the city who have children a little too old for nursemaids and who go to day school. Their parents must be puzzled what to do with them in their free hours. They can't turn them out in the New York streets. It's too dangerous. Besides, there's nothing for them to do there. And they must get tired—those older children—of constantly playing in the Park, and many of them can't afford a special attendant. Now I'd like to take little groups of say six or eight, ten at the most, for long walks up the river and out into the suburbs, into museums occasionally and to selected art-exhibitions—but most of it to be in the open air. To keep them exercising all the time—that would be my idea—and yet to get them into the habit of looking at the world, talking it over, and thinking about it."

"Say, that would be a good scheme, Hester," Southward said. "I'd bet you would make a success of that. You have so much patience, especially with children. I couldn't do it. Some day I'd get mad and brain one of the little devils. Why don't you talk it over with John and Edith?"

"What's the use?" Hester sighed. "Mother wouldn't ever let me leave her for good. And she won't go away from Shayneford."

"You don't know," Southward returned. "She might do it sometime. You never can tell. You wouldn't have believed last summer that you were going to spend the winter in New York."

Nevertheless, Hester did speak of her scheme to both Edith and John. They encouraged her warmly.

"Keep thinking that over, Hester," John advised. "Work up some routes for such entertainment, and the line of talk you'd de-

velop with the children. Who knows but your chance will come some day? Edith and I—all of us—will root as hard as we can for you.”

A second of Edith's intimates was a Mrs. Pelham, a widow. She was a strange-looking woman. Tall, gaunt, blond, her cheeks sank into shadow-lined hollows, her eyes, grey-green, retreated into deep shadow-filled caverns. At a distance, her facial aspect was a little that of a skull. And yet she had a kind of worn attractiveness. She gave an impression of lifelessness; for she rarely talked. Still, when a vivacious mood seized her, she proved interesting; for she was widely-read, much-travelled, and a musician of technique and taste.

She lived in a boarding-house on upper Madison Avenue. Hester went there occasionally for dinner and the evening. Mrs. Pelham had a small apartment in the front of the house, a big living-room with an alcove bedroom. She had furnished it herself, she told Hester, but that was evident from its individuality; the substantial old walnut-set in brown velours; the family pictures that made with the profusion of foreign litter a pleasing whole. Photographs of people in beautiful frames, silver, morocco, tortoise-shell lay everywhere; among them, recurring with a notable regularity, one of a young man. Without comment, Hester followed his trail—it was a frank, fine, gaily-handsome face—from table to mantel and from mantel to book-cases, from book-cases to walls, until she had completed the circle.

“My son,” Mrs. Pelham said quietly when Hester stopped at the last picture. “He's been dead for five years,” she added as Hester bit off the question that formed on her lips.

Then very quietly, in almost a casual way she went on:

“We were traveling in the Sahara together, during the summer. The next year he was to finish at Harvard. He had studied hard and I felt that he needed a complete change. I asked him where he wanted to go and he said, ‘Into the desert.’ And so we went. It was a beautiful trip; a small party of us, just wandering here, there, everywhere, any place that he wanted to go. He enjoyed it more than any travelling we'd ever done; we were great pals, my boy and I. It was the last week and we were beginning to pack to go home. One night towards twilight, he started alone to take a little walk away from camp. I was sitting in my tent. He called to me that he was going, waved a good-bye and started off. There was a rising full moon when he started. He seemed to walk right into it. I never saw him alive again. A sandstorm came up. As soon as they could of course searching parties went

out—but it was a week before they found him. Of course that week was—— There was a physician in our party—and—after a while—he said that Ted must be dead—nobody could survive—— It was easier then. But it wasn't quite easy until they found him and I knew he couldn't be dying anywhere alone." She stopped, tranquilly lighted a cigarette; puffed it.

After a long while Hester spoke. But first she looked at all the pictures again.

"Did you curse your God for giving him to you," she asked, "if he meant to take him away in that fashion?"

"No. Or at least for a while I don't know what I did. Possibly I did. But now I thank Him for the gift of Ted's life—for what I had of it. It's so strange. Everybody pities me. Edith pities me. Rena pities me. You would have pitied me, but you won't when I tell you this, I pity them. Somehow I feel so superior, so privileged. I'm so much happier than either of those women. I lost him. *But I had him!* For twenty happy, happy years I had him. Do you suppose there is any unhappiness that could ever wipe out that happiness?"

"No," Hester said. A wave of certainty deepened her voice to hoarseness, "No. Of course not."

The men of Edith's group—and this was not entirely the effect of masculinity—seemed more positive. John and Ripley were its moving, dominant spirits. There came often Richard Curley, old, white-bearded, bald, a broker who had retired with a fortune and devoted his flagging energies to the collection of everything from Roman coins and ecclesiastical silver to handboxes and bird-cages. Rockwell Doane, violinist, used to hold the company spellbound through long, long intervals. He was a quiet middle-aged man with a long Dantesque face that, peering above the polished curves of his violin, seemed in the shifting shadows of Edith's drawing-room like some mediæval gargoyle.

Last of all came a boy-illustrator, Jackie Fell, whom the circle esteemed a genius. Jackie was a slender, pale, dark lad with shining eyes always laughing and downy hair always ruffled, shy with the look of a chicken newly-hatched contemplating the universe in troubled wonder. He lived in a strange fairy world that he had invented himself. That world he called the "Little Country."

He always made a joke of the real world but he took the "Little Country" very seriously. And he referred to it with such frequency, candour, and verisimilitude that the rest of the group came gradually to accept it as real. Jackie gave them positions in it;

places to work and places to live; names, occupations, responsibilities. They developed a "little language" which was their joint invention and which would have made much of their conversation unintelligible to a stranger. In his nomenclature, Jackie alternated poetic appellations with slangy ones. For instance, Edith whom he adored was the Queen of the "Little Country" but John was the Chief Cop. One of his fancies was that conspirators whom he called "the gang" were always trying to poison the Queen, another that the Chief Cop constantly took graft. Miss Osgood was the Baby-Hunter, Mrs. Pelham the Good-Peasant-in-the-Forest, Curley the Guardian-of-the-Pyx, Doane the Court-Magician. Ripley was the Keeper of the Great Seal. And in order for Ripley the more carefully to fulfil this function, an enormous swimming tank had been built inside his palace. Within the tank, the Great Seal flopped happily from water to ice-floe. Hester he said was the Shy Fawn living in the Royal Forest, wild and of an unimaginable swiftness. She was under an enchantment. But what she had been before she turned fawn nobody knew.

One day Hester went with Edith to Jackie's studio—a room near the top of the Metropolitan Tower. She spent an absorbed afternoon looking at his work. He was doing three sets of pictures to illustrate as many books, fairy forest-pictures, fairy air-pictures, fairy sea-pictures. They were complicated compositions that, even in their small compass, gave an effect of simplicity; crowds of figures, a multiplicity of detail, done with precision and delicacy. From a distance, the main outlines were bold; yet the microscope revealed treasure of exquisite workmanship.

In one of the sea-pictures, a little mermaid wore long earrings made of many drops of blood-red coral.

"That's you, Hester," Jackie said. "Those aren't really earrings. It's blood. You see she's under an enchantment and the blood can't stop flowing until the spell is broken."

To these people, Edith was a kind of social Lady Bountiful. It was evident that they brought many of the perplexities of their lives to her, that she listened with a sympathy that never dissolved in mere talk. She served them in all kinds of delicate and unobtrusive ways. Hester fitted into this group as in the whole course of her life she had fitted into no other. Perhaps socially she was the most shy and inhibited of all of them; but obviously she gained confidence from a perception of their shyness and inhibitions. And then Edith, who seemed to grow more tired every day, came to depend more and more on Hester to assist her on the occasions in which she entertained.

Edith's day, it soon transpired, was an abnormal one. She arose at noon; ate a meagre breakfast which was also lunch; spent most of the afternoon on one of her various beauty-chasing raids in antique-shops or auctions, or on clothes-hunting expeditions through the most expensive shops on the Avenue. Late in the afternoon she drove. Up the Avenue through the Park, on to the drive, back into the Park and down the Avenue—the radius of her drives never lengthened. She walked here no more than in Shayneford. She used taxis as she would use postcards. Dinner alone was a simple affair; with guests a complicated one. Often at night she went to the opera, or to a concert, and occasionally to the theatre. At midnight came a little supper; then bed. Came bed but not sleep. She seemed sensitive in regard to this wakefulness, for she never discussed it directly. But in her conversation, there was enough oblique allusion to apprise the least observant of a prevalent state of insomnia. Apparently she read from midnight to dawn. What sleep came afterwards must have been of a strange and troubled variety; for Edith's first waking hours were manifestly broken ones. She talked a great deal in irrelevant phrases which rambled anywhere but towards a point, and which had no connection with each other or with the subject under discussion. In those early hours of her late day, Edith looked as strange as she sounded—yellowly pale, purply-hollow; worn.

One day Hester said to Miss Osgood, "I'm really very worried about Edith. I know she isn't well and I think she knows it herself, but she simply will not talk about her condition. Have you noticed it?"

"Oh, yes," Miss Osgood answered directly. "Of course I have. Some day I'm going to have a long talk with her. I'm doing my best now to get her to see a physician—I know just the one for her. I can't do anything about it until that aunt of hers gets through dying though. But that may come any day now. Mrs. Blaisdell can't last much longer."

"I always feel so secure when I realise Edith has you to take care of her," Hester added. "Because you really love her. You'd do anything for her."

"Yes, I love her," Miss Osgood agreed. "I never could pay Edith back for what she's done for me—not if I tried all the rest of my life. But I'd like to get the chance."

"I love her too," Hester said. "And I owe her a great deal. No woman except Southward has ever been so kind to me. Perhaps we'll both get our chance some day."

CHAPTER XVIII

JOHN called up Hester on the telephone late one snowy afternoon with a, "Don't you want to go out to dinner with me to-night? I had intended to take Edith but she's just telephoned to say that she was rushing over to New Jersey to see that aunt."

"I'd love it, John," Hester answered with her characteristic frankness, "only—why don't you come here; Southward is off unexpectedly with Dwight and I'd just bought such a delicious dinner for us two. It's on the stove now. Don't you think you'd enjoy some home cooking?"

"You bet I would," John answered with equal frankness. "I'll be up in half an hour."

He was there sooner than that however; soon enough to spread the table while Hester cooked the steak. He found the dinner delicious and did not hesitate to say so. They had steak and stewed tomatoes, a salad of lettuce and cucumber, a cottage pudding with hard sauce. After dinner, John helped Hester to wipe the dishes.

"You certainly have made this place your own," he said as he filled his pipe and began comfortably to draw on it. "Women are amazing creatures in that respect. They can do anything. Adopt, adapt, adept—that's your sex motto, isn't it?"

The kitchen really looked like a living-room. The floor was of course bare and there were no pictures on the painted yellow walls; no superfluous decorations of any kind. But a big screen of gilded burlap concealed the stove, sink, and ice-box. Over this habitually hung Southward's tomato-coloured prince's coat. The shelves, at one side, were filled with the collection of old Russian copper that Southward, with Dwight's assistance, was gradually collecting from East Side junk shops. The little china-cabinet housed rows of plates and cups of a coarse yellow china, dashed with barbaric colour. From brown paper Hester had made for the electric light which dropped over the centre-table a shade whose shape everybody admired. She had stained the big deal table, which was the only bit of furniture they bought, a clean green that harmonised perfectly with the clear yellow of the walls and the warm brown of the woodwork. There was nothing on the table now but a big

basket of fruit. Hester had not pulled down the shade and the frame of their single broad window enclosed a big rectangle of the blue New York dusk bisected by massive folds of snow on the roof across the court. Hester sat under the light, knitting with long white needles on a huge worsted afghan in alternate stripes of dark blue and deep green.

"And you like it here, don't you, Hester?" John went on.

"Oh, yes—I'm very pleased with this little place. I'd be perfectly happy in New York if everything didn't frighten me a little still. And if I weren't haunted by the fear that this is my only peep at life, that I've got to go back into that terrible grey vagueness in which I've always lived."

"You may have to go back to it," John conceded, "but it will never be the same."

"No, it can't be that," Hester agreed, "but I'm afraid that it will be worse. You see—well, I don't think you can understand what my feeling towards existence has been for the last five years. You can't imagine it because I can't explain it. But I've felt all the time that I wasn't really in life, but on the outside of it. It's more as if there was between me and life a sheathing of something transparent as glass, only soft and supple and indestructible. There is no opening anywhere and I can't break through that unyielding obstinacy. I can see what is going on under the glass, but I can't hear anything. I'm always on the outside. I was on the outside in Shayneford and I'm on the outside here. But it's more interesting here, looking on. Of course, though, there must be a point somewhere where I can break through. If I can only find it."

"You'll find it," John prophesied quietly.

"I hope so," Hester said. She knitted a little while in silence. It was John who broke that silence first.

"Your hair is very wonderful with that light pouring on it," he said inconsequently. "It looks as though the light were liquid; it's running down your braids in little sparks and globules of gold."

Hester went on with her knitting. She did not raise her eyes, but her fingers grew a little agitated.

"It's a good composition," John went on contemplatively, "the background, the gold screen with that tomato-coloured Chinese thing—the green table-top with that mound of yellow, orange, and crimson fruit, all that deep green and purple stuff you're working on and the white needles. Yes, 'paintable' is the word."

"You said you were never going to stop telling me that," Hester

reminded him a little tremulously. "Oh, please don't stop—it makes me so happy!"

John veered; returned to a previous subject of conversation.

"Of course about this—what you call 'breaking through into life'—I don't know when it will come or where or why. All I know is that it will come. You can't beat life. It's like trying to get away from the air. It's there, all around you; you can't suppress it. Life is bound to get you. Sooner or later, it'll reach out to claw or caress you, one or the other; perhaps both."

"I don't care which it does," Hester declared simply, "as long as it does something."

John turned the subject. For the first time he told Hester something of his work. She knew from Southward through Dwight that several years before John had given up a good position on an evening paper to work on an East Side weekly, that he had put the little, dying *Tomorrow* on its feet. John did not refer to this. But he told her of some of the conditions under which he worked.

An old ramshackle building on the lower East Side, dirty, tiny, and inconvenient, housed their plant; next door stood a paint and varnish shop, which helped make *Tomorrow* the worst fire risk in Manhattan. The front windows looked out on the wide, crowded, jangling, clanging Avenue, the back onto a collection of backyards fecund with the details of a picturesque alien life. Of his small force, most were East Side Jews, all enthusiasts, and some cranks. His stenographer, Minnie Levinsky, a pretty, gazelle-eyed, twenty-year-old Jewess, had come from Russia at ten with no language but her own. Now she not only spoke better English than he, but some French. She had picked up, God knows how, shorthand and stenography and was studying law; she spent her evenings reading in the Public Library. Isadore Goldknoff, his fifteen-year-old office boy, had a deep, slum-bred knowledge of human nature, a preternatural social cunning, upon which John depended to keep off cranks. These cranks hounded his footsteps and took up his time. There was the handsome and futile society woman who suddenly decided to become the link between Capital and Labour; there was the mild old greybeard, obsessed with the idea that the earth was about to be inundated by an ice-deluge from the North Pole and who had invented a system to avert the calamity; there was a quiet-spoken retired army officer who had a scheme for organising the industries of America on a Germanic basis. "He is hardest of all to turn down," said John, "he is such a gentleman." Among his regular and useful contributors, the

most revolutionary was a little old Maine woman, white-haired and wearing a cap; the most brilliant, a remarkable young poet whom he had dug starving out of a garret and who had since performed the phenomenal feat of writing a best-selling book of verse; the most promising, a young person who wrote under the pseudonym "John Stallard" the virile "Glimpses of the Ghetto," and who, run to earth, proved to be a Barnard College girl. His weekly bugbear was getting the paper to press. His contributors, writing mostly for their causes, had the tardiness of amateurs. Copy always arrived at the eleventh hour, and on Tuesday he and the foreman of the East Side shop which had the printing contract worked together all night.

This first call of John's was followed by many others. He did not always come alone. Sometimes he brought Edith, sometimes Ripley; sometimes both. But in these cases the call was not so likely to end in a walk. In the main they walked alone. John knew New York. He showed her all kinds of out-of-the-way spots. He had associated much with artists and, as far as the layman may, had absorbed the artist's point of view. There were bits that his memory had hoarded from all over New York; and for those bits he demanded special hours; old doorways; churches; vine-hung yards; the river from certain bridge eyries; the harbour from certain tall buildings; the palisades and the water-front. There were places in Europe of which many of these things reminded him; and he told Hester about them as she looked at the New York variants. Occasionally, he took her to a lecture, a Socialist Local, an I. W. W. meeting. But Hester always emerged from revolutionary discussion in a state of mind so baffled that for days afterwards she met him with lists of questions which had developed in her mind. John prescribed a course of reading for her, sent her some of these books, procured others from the Library. She read everything he suggested, read with a dogged persistence but with great difficulty of comprehension. She complained always that she could not connect that kind of theory with life. Moral precept she could translate into action; but social vision seemed to hang undetached in sidereal space.

All this, though John tried to defer to her shyness, meant social contact, for John's acquaintance widened wherever it touched rebellion. He was always introducing her to people who, Hester afterwards said, might for the strangeness of their vocabulary have come from Mars. On the street, they ran into friends of earlier and more simple days. Here it would be a little East Side Jewess whom he had met in a college settlement and who plunged, in

fluent thickly-accented English, into rapid joyous reminiscences of the amateur plays in which they had acted. There it would be a young Irish-American lad with whom he had boxed at the gymnasium and who told him proudly of recent feats in swimming and running. Oftenest of all perhaps they were elderly people, an ashy furtive spinster, a widow, equally colourless, shabby middle-aged men with failure written all over them whom he had met in some hole-in-the-corner boarding-house. In one neighbourhood bordering on lower Second Avenue, he introduced her to the policeman on the beat, the postman, the corner grocer, the delicatessen-keeper, the butcher, the baker, the bootblack, and the fruit man. He had lived in that neighbourhood for several years and had succeeded in getting acquainted with everybody who touched his life. He had gone to their weddings, their christenings, and their funerals. Later he had described this experience in an article called "Village Life in Manhattan," and at Hester's request he dug up a copy from among his papers. Sometimes he would call on her for three days in succession. Then again she would not see him for a week. Their conversation always began with a consideration of their common responsibility—Edith. Each day Hester grew more and more concerned over Edith's condition. John had already, he told Hester, begun the long campaign of persuasion to which Edith always had to be subjected before she would consult a physician.

"Everybody who knows her loves Edith," Hester remarked once, "but I think you and I love her most."

John was silent for a moment. "Of course I'd do anything for her," he said finally.

But their conversation inevitably drew away from this common interest, wandered far afield. It travelled in comment to the places they had come to see; it darted abruptly to revelations of personal preferences; it went back to John's month in Shayneford which they admitted to each other was an oasis in hard living; it hovered over the interval of their separation; it returned to the present. It grew more and more intimate as the weeks went by. Hester soon formed the habit of telling John all the simple events of her New York life; her struggles with metropolitan marketing, her observations on her neighbours in the model tenement. John encouraged these confidences as he encouraged any narration which tended to increase Hester's developing powers of articulateness. Besides, he was always peculiarly interested in experiences of value from the sociological aspect.

CHAPTER XIX

RIPLEY came occasionally. But his calls were rare. Busy as John was, Ripley was busier. They talked at great length; for the easiest talking Hester did was with Ripley. He had a detachment from personal concerns which unloosed her confidence. And he listened with as much interest as understanding and sympathy. Ripley, whether for fear of boring people or because it pained him, never spoke of his own work. And Hester, who rarely asked questions, made no reference to it. One day he had suggested an outdoors expedition. They took the subway to the water's edge; walked across Brooklyn Bridge and back. On the bridge, they stopped and stood for a long while gazing on the shuffling scene below, a composite of watercraft—big, broad-beamed, waddling ferries, tiny, puffing, churning tugs, slim, graceful, darting motor-boats, and in their midst a great, ocean-going freighter putting uncertainly out from her dock. A tugboat caught this latter, manœuvred it so that finally it steamed calmly and slowly straight down the river.

Ripley's eyes fastened on the steamer. His gaze grew absent, as he appeared to follow a train of thought which utterly ignored Hester. "It's very strange," he said after a time, "how little things influence big things, from what tiny causes come what seem to us big results. Look at that tug. It gave that great ship wobbling uncertainly at the dock a little poke—and now there she goes swinging out of the harbour as sure of herself as can be. Something like that happened to me once." He broke off, followed the liner and tug with an amused smile. Hester did not break the spell by a word, scarcely a breath. He went on. "You see I hadn't any idea that I was going to be a reformer. I thought I was going to be a painter. My father was a painter and a good one. My mother, before her marriage, had been a musician and a good one. I have guessed that she was a better musician than my father was painter. Anyway she gave up all ambition when she married, in the way women do. She proved a big stimulating, enriching, adjuvant force in my father's career. She was a wonder. I was the oldest child. All children are imitative and I began to paint virtually as soon as I could handle a paint-brush. My people accepted this imitativeness as inherited talent, as people

do. It was always taken for granted that I should be a painter. People are just beginning nowadays to try to discover some divining-rod by which they shall determine the real bent of a child's abilities. But then nobody thought of anything like that. Either they planned the child's career carefully themselves, or left it to chance. And so I thought I was going to be a painter just as they did. Of course I got plenty of instruction at home—and good instruction. The first fifteen years of my life, we wandered everywhere. Then we went back to the old family place in Massachusetts. They sent me to Harvard," Ripley smiled retrospectively. "Harvard didn't hurt me so much as it might. It rolled off. But I was just planning to go to Paris for a year's work at the Louvre, when I went to a little manufacturing town in New England to visit a friend. While I was there, there occurred a—what is it they always call it—the usual crime against women."

He paused and contemplated the water darkling now towards sunset and with lights winking here and there along the shores.

"Only this wasn't the usual crime of a black man against a white woman. It was the crime of a white man against a black girl. I saw her afterwards—a little slender terrified thing, quite helpless. Here's where the fable of the tug and the ocean-liner comes in. That incident gave me the impetus that nothing else could. It changed my life. It made a different creature of me. I have never had the same kind of mind since. All that superimposed art-ambition, all that adventitious art-atmosphere fell from me as completely as though it had never been. Of course it had never been in any real sense. I came home, told my people what I was going to do, and fought it through. I came out victor. I had some money of my own. I came to New York and started *The Negro Woman*. That was about sixteen years ago. I've been at it ever since. It was strange how it happened, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Hester agreed. "Very, very strange!" she mused. "That's how you broke through," she said after a while.

"What do you mean—*broke through*?" Ripley asked.

"Broke through into life. Perhaps we're all like that—sheathed about by an artificial stratum of living conditions. It must have been very hard for you though, especially at first. And the obstacles must many of them have been of a kind you couldn't foresee or anticipate."

"Yes, it was like that," Ripley agreed. "But it had its compensations. I've met many remarkable coloured people. If

I ever introduced white people to them, I would introduce you. But it so often leads to complications that I make it a rule not to do it."

He went on to tell her about *The Negro Woman*, a long story of an uphill fight and a steady growth in standing and influence. He described some of the handicaps which life in a large city presents to black people; segregation; high rents for property never repaired; inadequate police protection; robberies and extortions of one kind or another all along the line of living. He outlined his schemes for changing this.

"I've talked a lot about myself this afternoon," he said as they emerged from the subway. "Now tell me what New York is doing for you."

"It's entertaining me," Hester declared, "wonderfully. But it's frightening me terribly."

"You'll get over that," Ripley prophesied authoritatively.

At the door, he held out his hand. Hester placed her hand on his palm.

"Do you know, Hester," he said suddenly, "you don't know how to shake hands. All you do is just to place your fingers in mine. It's exactly as though you handed me an empty glove. Of course nobody shakes hands in any literal sense nowadays. But you should give a hearty hand-clasp. Let's try it again. Now remember this time to take my hand as well as to give me yours."

He held out his hand again.

Hester, in what was palpably an agony of embarrassment, seized it blindly.

"No, that won't do. Scarcely any better than before. Remember, Hester, I taught you to dance. Come! once more!"

Again he reached his hand for hers.

"A little better this time," he said encouragingly. "But you can beat that. Now try again!"

Again and again, Hester gave him her hand. Her embarrassment wore off, gradually; she began after a while to take an amused enjoyment in the sport. She succeeded finally in grasping Ripley's hand with a quick, firm pressure.

"That was good—that last one!" Ripley approved. "And I want you to practise hand-shaking on everybody, Hester. When I see you again, if there isn't a permanent improvement, I'll start all over again. Good night."

Hester found the apartment empty. Later, when Southward's key clicked in the latch, she arose and advanced, hand out.

Mechanically Southward placed her hand in Hester's. "What's the idea?"

"Ripley's been giving me a lesson in hand-shaking," Hester explained. "He says I don't do it right."

"You don't," Southward agreed promptly. "You never have. Why didn't you tell me?"

"It never occurred to me,"

"Well, how about this?" Hester inquired with one of her rare flashes of mischief.

Southward pulled her hand away; shook it.

"That was a wonder. Keep it up along those lines."

At intervals all that evening, Hester would advance suddenly on Southward; insist on shaking hands. Every day for a while, she shook hands before going to bed and on rising in the morning.

The next time she saw Ripley, who had apparently forgotten his lesson in the pleasure of meeting, she drew from him a surprised, "Great Scott, Hester!" And then a quick smile of congratulation.

CHAPTER XX

HESTER came to know a few of her neighbours in the model tenement. In the next apartment were two girls, a milliner and a dressmaker. The milliner, Maud Morpeth, was a Southerner, a little, round, curly-headed girl whose bright eyes peered out over dimples set high up on her cheek-bones and through little tangly, wavy strands of hair always falling over her forehead. The dressmaker was a Westerner, Ellen Day; a face delicately chiselled and faintly coloured, lost in an eternal reverie; a figure slimly tall and softly curved, bent in a perpetual droop.

These two girls had met in a boarding-house, had become fast friends and, deciding to set themselves up in business, had entered into a scheme of co-operative housekeeping that made for a mutual economy of time and money. Miss Morpeth had a tiny shop on Fourth Avenue. "But you watch me," she warned Hester with a snap of her eyes that even a thick wad of falling curls could not muffle, "Ah'm, saving money, honey. Pretty soon Ah'll move into a neighbourhood nearer the Avenue; then on one of the side streets just off; then to the Avenue itself. Ah have the shop all planned out—black and white and green with boxes of a big black and white plaid with green cords and my name MAUD written in gold across them. Then Ah'll begin to go every summer to Paris, honey, and my fortune will be made."

Miss Day's program was not so definitely made out, although she was no less ambitious than her companion. But whereas Miss Morpeth was a business woman, she was an artist. The idea for gowns came to her, as creative ideas often come to artists, in lightning flashes, leaving her giddy with a sense of achieved beauty. Many of her leisure moments were spent in translating these ideas by means of sketches, amusingly amateur, into a notebook. Personality made a strong impression on her; often set the sartorial wheels to moving. The sketch-book displayed pages of gowns designed for certain women stars of the theatrical world whose beauty inspired her. She was always showing Southward the extraordinary creations in which she would have liked to clothe her. And a single glimpse of Azile, one afternoon, threw her into a very orgy of invention.

Beyond them lived a girl stenographer, Amy Egan, a slender, mouse-coloured nondescript who, shy enough at first, soon reached the point where to Hester she chattered of all the details of her life; the home, too crowded with children, in the little Middle Western town; the sixteen-year-old sister, who was a beauty and stage-struck, and determined to leave school in order to go on the stage; the huge, clean, massively-furnished room at the top of a downtown skyscraper where she worked; her big desk beside a window from which she saw the ships passing back and forth in the harbour; the crowd of girls who lunched together every Thursday in a business man's café; the little stern, powerful captain-of-industry from whom she took dictation; how she was studying French in order to take care of his French correspondence.

"All those girls are so happy in their careers," Hester told John. "I suppose it's because it's something they're making for themselves. It makes teaching seem so weak and futile, somehow. And I'm considered a pretty good teacher."

One afternoon there came a knock, tiny and quick, on the door. Hester opened it. On the threshold stood an old lady in a black gown of a soft rustleless silk, black lace mitts, a kerchief and a close cap of broad-hemmed muslin. She was little and frail and white, so transparent that the light of her spirit seemed to shine through her neatly-chiselled face in a continuous pour.

"Good afternoon, my dear," she chirped in a little voice, surprisingly clear. "I heard there were two girls from Massachusetts living downstairs and I couldn't rest until I'd come down to see you. My name is Edgerley—Mrs. Edgerley. I'm a Massachusetts woman myself and although I haven't lived in Warrentown for years, I always like to talk with Massachusetts folks. There's an awful lot of culture in them most generally. Where do you come from, my dear?"

Hester answered this question and a dozen others which followed in its wake. "I'm sorry Miss Drake isn't here," she concluded, "but I expect her back any moment."

"I hope she'll come," Mrs. Edgerley said, "because there's something I want to talk to both of you about. My land, how pretty you've made it here. Let me see, seems to me your kitchen is larger than ours. I don't know though—we have a jog over there. 'Pears to me they ain't quite the same shape."

Hester made tea and sandwiches and while they were in the midst of this Southward entered. She said that she would have to leave immediately. But nevertheless, she sat down and talked

with their guest. Only three species of creatures melted Southward's youthful hardness—old people, sick people, and dogs. Now she listened with her most appreciative glimmer to the rambling monologue which Mrs. Edgerley emitted.

She was over eighty years old; her young womanhood had seen the Civil War. She was a niece of the famous Maria Jackson Tate, one of that group of pioneer suffragists who came into prominence just after the Civil War. Susan Anthony, Elizabeth Stanton, Lucy Stone, Mary Livermore, John J. Whittier, William Lloyd Garrison were some of the names which glanced in and out of her narrative.

"Once auntie let me go with her on a suffrage trip she took with Susan and Mary and William," she said. "Their meetings were most all of them held in little towns. Woman suffrage was awful unpopular in those days. Of course they'd advertise the meeting as good as they could, but they couldn't do much because they didn't have enough money. The hall would fill up with the most disrespectful kind of crowd, rowdies and roughs and riff-raff of all description. Often they'd begin to hoot and whistle and make catcalls and yell out the most insulting things. Sometimes we'd be afraid there was going to be a riot. Those times we'd allus send out Mary to quiet them. There was something about Mary—she was kinder, well, *majestic* I suppose you'd call it. Anyway, she'd jest walk straight out to the middle of the platform and stand there as quiet as a statue—great, tall, handsome woman she was—and look that audience in the eye. She'd start at one side and jess sweep over them to the other side, staring hard at them all. Well, you'd oughter have seen it. All that noise would die down till you could hear the big clock ticking at the far end of the hall. She was a wonderful woman. Oh, but land, they all were! I never saw such women. There are lots of able women in the movement now—young and handsome and beautifully dressed and grand talkers—but there aren't none like those early ones—the Big Four, I used to call them. Oh, and my sakes, how they used to pinch and save to make the money go as far as it could. When I see them spending money like water now, I think of those days when printing a program was a very important item. Why, last year, my daughter took me to a suffrage convention down South and a rich lady entertained all the delegates to lunch. She had a great big house with servants in livery. How many there were I don't know. I tried to keep track of them, but I couldn't. And we ate our luncheon off of gold plate. And champagne—why champagne

flowed like *water*. Oh, you don't know how I wished that Susan and auntie had been there to see it."

She stopped to oversee the pouring of another cup of tea. "A little hot water, if you please, Miss Crowell—that tea's kinder pale, but it draws stronger than it looks. Thank you. What nice little sandwiches! I do like sandwiches. I allus feel when I eat them the way I did when I was a little girl and went off on picnics. I often think of Susan in these days. Susan was such a lovely character. Nobody but those who lived with her knew jest how lovely she was. My aunt told me once that Susan said to her, 'Maria, folks are always blaming me in their hearts because I've never married and brought up a family. They think I'm one of those unsexed women who don't care anything about such things. Why, Maria, I'd like to have a family and children as much as any other woman—I'd love it. But I've never had the time.' And that's jest the way she was—a true devoted creature, giving up everything, even her chance of happiness, to the cause. Well, I wish she could come back now and see how the little seed she dropped has sprouted and grown into a big tree. If she could only see what these New York women do. My land, it's wonderful in campaign times; hundreds of outdoor meetings as well as indoor meetings; bazaars and benefits and addresses in the theatre and suffrage hikes and parades. You'd think they had all the money in the world. Take my daughter—she's Mrs. Amos Fanshawe," she dropped in proud parenthesis. "She's president of this Assembly District. They have a place over in Long Island where they keep the children. But she's hired two apartments here, one to live in, and one to do the Assembly business in. We spend most of the week here; then we go home over Sundays. Amos, my son-in-law, is jest as interested as she is. He helps her all he can and puts up with living in these small rooms without a murmur. I declare I think every day I ought to be the most grateful woman in the world that I've lived to see these times."

The two girls did little else but drop exclamatory comments until, through sheer lack of breath, Mrs. Edgerley ran down. But they were not bored. Hester's face was soft with sympathetic interest; and Southward's mischievous smile still rippled her red lips.

"Well, I hate to drag myself away," Southward averred, "but I've got to."

"Don't go for a minute," Mrs. Edgerley begged. "My land, I'd almost forgotten that I'd come here on business as well as

pleasure." She fumbled in the reticule she carried. Among the mass of documents which would have eluded any other fingers less quick and slim, she pulled out some yellow papers. "I want you to sign these pledges, if you will, that you'll march in the parade next spring."

"I'll march," Southward said, "I've already signed one of the slips. We're both suffragists. I sell the *Equal Franchise* two afternoons every week. Miss Crowell hasn't signed a slip yet. I can't make her. You must get after her."

"I'll do that," solemnly vowed Mrs. Edgerley, shaking her head with a sage expression. "I'll camp right on her trail from now on."

But apparently she had had enough suffrage for the afternoon. She did not mention the subject again during her call. Indeed she seemed more interested in Southward. "Isn't she a handsome creature?" she said. "I admire to look at her. She's what I call a perfect beauty without paint or whitewash."

Mrs. Edgerley was true to her word. She came often to the apartment and she wooed the unresponsive Hester with every argument in her old-time panoply. Hester enjoyed her visits quite as much as Southward, for though the little old lady's narrative often rambled, it was always alive. Southward always gave Mrs. Edgerley what late information in regard to the suffrage movement she had in the meantime gleaned. Mrs. Edgerley listened avidly, dropping keen caustic comment all along the route.

One day Mrs. Edgerley brought her daughter—a big, handsome, energetic-looking, middle-aged blonde. Mrs. Fanshawe tried her persuasive powers on Hester, but all to no purpose. "I'm not going to give you up yet, Miss Crowell," she said as she left. "It's nonsense you're not marching as long as you're convinced. I give you my word that after half a block you won't think of yourself. You'll be too interested in what's going on round about you."

John listened with his accustomed sympathy, his quiet understanding, his deferential air of enjoyment, to Hester's accounts of these people. In every possible way, by question and comment and direct appeal, he encouraged her to develop social relation; to tell him the result of these pursuits.

CHAPTER XXI

THERE were many afternoons and evenings when Hester was alone, however. But she rarely seemed to be idle. She read and wrote letters; she darned and cooked. When these occupations gave out, she sat for long intervals at the window, her hands clasped in her lap, gazing at a street scene which from early morning to late dusk produced kaleidoscopic colour and bewildering clatter. But even then she was mentally busy. That was apparent from her expression, wondering sometimes, or perplexed; often desperately harried, despairing, and frightened. When these reflections got beyond her, a quick jump to her feet, a flurried rush to her hat and coat, would carry her on one of her long solitary walks. Sometimes these strolls followed in the wake of an exploring expedition that she had already made with John. Then she gazed hard at everything he had already pointed out to her, gazed as though trying to grave it on her memory forever.

These walks came as often in the evening as the afternoon. Then as though subconsciously attracted by the glare, she made for Broadway; walked slowly through the rushing lights to Forty-second Street, then east and back down the silent dark Avenue, home. On Broadway, she consciously looked about her, as though trying to beat off that band of frantic reflections by tying her observation to definite things. But almost invariably in crossing to the Avenue, her head would begin to sink and by the time she reached the deserted purlieus of the most luxurious shopping area in the city, she would be lost in meditation. One night as she was walking thus, a voice suddenly called.

"Well, look who's here! Hester Crowell! Of all things! Can you tie it?"

Hester turned sharply. "Well, Josie Caldwell! Oh, I am glad to see you! How are you, Josie?"

"Fine and dandy! Say, you're looking pretty slick yourself, Hester. Come on and walk a little way with me, will you? I'll go as far as the Avenue. How long have you been here and how long are you on for? And how's everything going in Shayneford?"

"I've been here five months. Southward and I are keeping

house here together. We have a little model tenement on the East Side. I broke down with a sort of nervous prostration last fall and the doctor said I must have a complete change. Southward wanted to live in New York for a winter, so we came together. I never saw you looking better, Josie."

Josie was a small slim girl—from her very smallness and slimness offering an effect of young girlishness that her face, carefully examined, did not re-enforce. She was neat-featured, piquant. All her efforts in dressing were palpably directed to accentuate that piquancy; the suit of black-and-white broad-cloth, the ruff of black-and-white malines, not tied but falling away from the cut-out V of her gown; the ruffles of delicate lace in her elbow sleeves; the earrings of jet and crystal; the bunch of fresh violets; the gaily-buckled low shoes and above all the hat faced with rose-coloured satin, whose glow tried to correct the sharpness of her eyes.

"I'm feeling swell," admitted Josie. "It's a good thing you're on here, Hester. I can see what it's done for you. I should think you'd be dead, teaching brats all these years. How do you like our fair city?"

"I'm having a wonderful time, Josie. There's only one out about it. I've got to go back sometime."

"The answer to that," Josie advised, "is never to go back. I'd die in that dead little burg. Oh, say, what's this I read about Gert Beebe. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw she'd married Buster Welch."

"I don't know any' more about it than you do," Hester said. "I saw it in the paper; then mother wrote how surprised everybody in Shayneford was."

"I suppose he was the father of that brat?"

"I suppose he was."

"Well, of all things!" Josie laughed harshly. "I'm awful glad for Gert," she added in another moment. "And Buster's a good, clean, square boy."

"Do you know him?" Hester asked.

"No, but I've heard a lot of talk about him. He fights clean as a whistle and never lays down. He keeps away from the white lights too. Oh, he's a good, straight farmer-kid yet. Southward having a good time?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"I suppose every man that sees her gets stuck on her the way they always did. I never saw such a girl as Southward. Eats them alive."

"Yes, Southward's very attractive. Everybody likes her."

"I've always liked her," Josie stated. "I like to see a girl hand it to men. When I was in school, I used to think I'd rather be Southward Drake than anybody I'd ever seen."

"Josephine! Josephine!" a voice called. A taxi that had come churning up behind them stopped at the curb. Josie turned about. The taxi-door opened and a girl leaped out. "Wait for me!" she said. She stopped to pay the driver. Josie halted for what was plainly an irresolute second. However she waited. And when the girl turned she said, "I'd like you to know my friend, Miss Crowell, Violet. Miss Wilson, Hester. Miss Crowell's a friend of mine from Shayneford, Violet," she explained. She seemed to lay a meaningful stress on the word Shayneford.

"Glad to know you, Miss Crowell," Violet said.

The two girls shook hands.

Violet was a very different type from Josie. Round, soft, meltingly featured, radiantly blond, she looked as though she were made of gauze, not flesh. She was noticeably dressed in pale blue and white. Her rather soiled tawdriness contrasted with Josie's crisp immaculateness.

"I saw you, Jo, as I came along," Miss Wilson explained. "And I realised that you were late at the—the hall—for the same reason I am. Your watch is wrong. I set mine by it last night."

"That so?" Josie asked. She consulted a little gold bracelet watch. "What time are you?"

Violet glanced at her watch, also of gold but set with blue enamel. "Quarter-past nine."

"That's right. I'm quarter to." With an expert movement, Josie set her watch right. "Well, I must be going, Hester. I wish I could see you again."

"Can't you come to see me?" Hester asked. "I'd love to have you."

"Sure I can. Where do you live? What's your phone number? I'd like to come sometime when you're alone?" She took a little leather book from her wrist-bag.

Hester supplied her with the necessary data. "I shall be glad to see you any time, Josie. I'm indoors a great deal. And of course if you telephone, I'll be sure to be there. I'd be pleased to have you bring Miss Wilson if she cares to come."

"All right," Jo said in a business-like way. Then, "Thanks!" Miss Wilson supplemented her.

"Who do you suppose I met on the street to-night, Southward?" Hester said at midnight when Southward came in.

"I couldn't guess in a million years," Southward declared. "Who?"

"Josie Caldwell."

"Good gracious! What did she have to say for herself? What's she doing. But I don't suppose she enlarged on that topic."

"No, and of course I didn't ask. But she's coming here to see us some day."

"Hope I'm home," Southward declared. "Still I shouldn't be surprised if you never heard from her again."

Nevertheless Josie called a few days later, without waiting to telephone. It was late in the afternoon and Hester immediately set about making tea. In the meantime Josie roamed through their three little rooms, examining the furnishings, surveying the pictures, studying the photographs on the bureaus. She did not stay long, but she asked numberless questions about Shayneford, answering some of them herself.

"How's that old cat of a Sarah Wallis? I wonder if Pearl will ever get Lysander. Now's her chance with Southward away. He'll never look at her when Southward's round. Just think of a pretty girl like Flora Tubman marrying such a fierce proposition as King Curtis. I suppose Pink'll marry Thode Snow sometime. He's another mess. I don't envy her."

"I'd like to have you come up and see me sometime, Hester," she said a little wistfully when she left. "I have a little apartment uptown. Violet's just across the hall from me."

"I'd like to come," Hester declared. "What time would I find you at home?"

"Well, if you were to come between five and six, that would strike me about right. My work is at night. I'm dancing in a cabaret in a Broadway café. That keeps me up pretty late and I sleep most of the day. What do you say to Friday. And if anything comes up to make it inconvenient for either one of us, why just phone."

"All right," Hester agreed.

As she got no deterring word in the meantime, Hester presented herself at the stipulated day and hour at Josie's address. It was a tall, thin, flimsily-built, highly-coloured apartment-house near the river. The street was filled with children and the omnipresent concomitants to life in the cheap neighbourhoods of New York city. The door clicked promptly to Hester's ring

and she walked through narrow halls and up narrow stairs until the doorway in which Josie stood arrested her.

"Come right in," the latter greeted her cordially, "I am glad to see you. I didn't know but what you'd get cold feet when it came to visiting me. I've got tea waiting."

In the number of its rooms, Josie's apartment was not larger than the model tenement, but the rooms themselves were much larger. With manifest pride, Josie showed a spotless kitchen, a spotless bathroom, a gaudy but equally spotless living-room, a bedroom spotless also but fairly spectacular. The bed and dresser were draped in a cheap flamboyant cretonne. On the walls were many pictures, highly coloured and gold-framed, of pretty women in evening clothes. They came back presently to the living-room where the tea was displayed on a cheap red-and-gold, Chinese tea-service.

"Don't go yet," Josie pleaded as Hester arose, having drunk her tea. "If you don't mind staying while I get ready, we can talk for half an hour longer. I've got to make-up though. I hope you won't object to that."

"Not at all," said Hester. "And I should like very much to watch you. I've never seen it done."

Josie pulled a little tabouret up to her dressing-table; sat on it. She tipped the mirror back. She flipped the covers off from a number of little boxes in a highly-embossed silver which it was apparent had recently been polished, and fell to work, talking all the time. Hester watched her reflection in the mirror.

Josie was still wearing a kimono, a thin silk banded in blue, and covered with great peacock-coloured poppies. Her hair was combed smoothly back into a little bundle held by a single hair-pin. The electric light beside the glass flared on her face, brought out to the last hair-line all the wrinkles that radiated about her eyes and ran in little colonies from her nose to her mouth. Her hair was quite lustreless and a little touched with grey at the temples. The flesh of her neck and arms, however, as it was revealed above her lacy, ribbon-wound underwear, was extraordinarily fresh and young. She worked quickly and deftly, stopping at intervals to study results with a squint-eyed scrutiny. Hester continued to watch every move, fascinated, absorbed. Mechanically she answered the flood of questions which Josie poured out about Shayneford. It was quite evident that, despite what she said in derogation of that "slow little burg," she still yearned for news of it. Hester had brought the last letter from her mother. She read it.

"I always liked your mother, Hester," Josie said.

"And she always liked you, Josie," Hester asserted.

"I've never forgotten her ginger-cookies. My word, but they were licking good. I'd like to have one this moment. Does she still make them?"

"Oh, yes," Hester answered, "she hasn't lost any of her faculty for cooking."

There came a pause in conversation.

In the meantime the work of facial rehabilitation was going steadily on. First Josie covered her face with a toilet cream, massaged it vigorously for a few minutes. Then she rubbed the cream off with a rough towel, rubbed it with a briskness that brought the blood surging to the surface. Then followed rouge applied with a rabbit's foot. Over the rouge came powder which covered gauzily the whole face and concealed that line of contact where artificial red merged with flesh tints. Next she made shadows under the eyes; pencilled her eyebrows; smudged her eyelashes. She pinkened her nostrils and ear lobes, reddened her lips. Last she washed her hands; spreading a whitening fluid on them and on her arms.

"You'll have to admit that's some improvement, Hester," she said as one anticipating unfavourable comment.

"I do," Hester admitted readily enough. She asked many interested questions about make-up materials.

The next step in the process of Josie's dressing was curling her hair, arranging it. This she did very skilfully. When she had finished, there was not a grey hair in sight. Then she slipped out of her kimono and into her immaculate black-and-white suit. She adjusted ruffles; added jewelry; put on her rose-lined hat and her crisp veil. She stood for a moment looking at herself in the glass, a close scrutiny for which she squinted her eyes sharply. That lynx-eyed examining air changed suddenly as she turned to Hester.

"I suppose you know what all this is about," she said abruptly. "When I speak of my 'work' I guess you know what I mean. If you don't, I'll tell you. For I wouldn't feel that I was doing the square thing letting you come here without knowing what I was doing. But you've always been so good to me whenever I've gone back to Shayneford, when everybody else has handed me a cut, that I've just taken it for granted that you were wise."

"Oh, yes, I know," Hester answered simply. "And it breaks my heart to think of it. I wish—oh, how I wish—it could be different. For your sake, Josie. But I—of course it doesn't make

any difference in my feeling for you. I've always had an idea that you weren't to blame, that you got into it against your own will, that you were drugged or——"

Josie interrupted with a brief strident laugh. "Drugged! Hell, no! Now I'm going to tell you something, Hester, not the whole story—though maybe I may tell you that some day. But what I'm saying is the truth. No, I wasn't drugged, or anything like that. I went into it with my eyes open—or open as wide as any woman's ever are who hasn't tried it. There was a particular reason why I did what I did and I'll tell you about that some day. I'm not so sorry either. There's lots of things about it I don't like, of course. But I've got a business head, and I clear anywhere from thirty to sixty a week and I've got my own bank-account. I'd rather be what I am now, believe me, kid, than a girl in a shop, or a waitress or a chambermaid. But don't think I was drugged or that anybody is. I'd be ashamed to pull that stuff, even if it was true. This white-slave proposition is a scream and everybody in the business knows it." She stopped and gave Hester a sideways glance. "I guess this is some shock to you, Hester."

"Yes, it is!" Hester said. "And then again it isn't; for it shouldn't be. I've given up thinking I know anything about life and the way people ought to live. Everybody has a problem and he must work it out in his own way. Nobody else can do it for him." She paused on a rush of words; turned to the general aspect of the conversation as though these concrete glimpses were a little too close. "Do you mean," she demanded, "that you have never in your experience heard of a girl being taken into this life against her will?"

Josie reflected, gazing squint-eyed into the mirror. "I did hear of a case once," she admitted slowly. "Now let me think about that. How was it?"

Her gaze narrowed and concentrated.

"Oh, I remember now. This happened about three years ago. I heard it told in half a dozen different ways but the gist of the mix-up was this. A young girl comes to New York from the country all alone. She boards at the same place with a woman who's interested in a high-class house uptown. This woman wanted a young, fresh pretty girl for special reasons and she wanted her quick. One story said it meant a thousand dollars to her. Anyway, she invites this girl to the house intending to keep her there until she'd be in such a state of mind that she'd never want to come out. She has a man there to handle her.

The girl walks into the house all right but the instant the door closes she gets wise to where she is—I guess likely they'd forgotten to cover the pictures. What do you suppose *she* does? Pulls a gun. I never believed this story myself, because what would a country-girl be travelling with a gun for? Anyway she shoots the guy just as he's coming towards her and makes her getaway."

"Was she arrested?" Hester asked breathlessly.

"Not in a thousand years," Josie declared. "Nothing like that in this business. Nobody'd ever make a complaint for fear of worse things. Of course the story leaked out after a while and that's how I happened to hear it. I've never quite swallowed it though."

"Did the man die?"

"No, though he all but. No, he's alive and kicking."

"It's a terrible story," Hester said gravely, "if true."

Josie apparently dismissed the whole subject from her mind as she transferred her squint-eyed gaze to the mirror again.

"Do you want to ride downtown with me?" she offered hesitatingly after a while. "Violet and I generally go down together. Remember, she's in the same business." Her warning tone seemed to hold a challenge.

"Yes. I think I understood that," Hester replied. "Yes, I'll go down with you."

They crossed the hall to Violet's apartment. Miss Wilson had just finished making up. She greeted them with what seemed a characteristic good nature, sparkling and warm; continued her preparation. Josie helped her into the gown of which many of the hooks were missing and parts of the lace torn. Violet rectified all this with a skilful use of pins.

Her rooms presented a characteristic contrast to Josie's. Two months after Christmas, a trio of crimson paper bells still dangled from the chandelier. Tattered dusty banners of red crêpe ran from it to the corners of the mantel. Her bed was not made. Her silver toilet articles, where they could be seen through a layer of soiled handkerchiefs, dingy white gloves and crumpled veils, were black with use.

"Now I'm all ready," she announced, adjusting the chin-strap of a big feather-laden hat. And in some extraordinary way, she managed to exude a feminine charm.

That night at dinner Hester told Southward the story that Josie had related to her.

The effect was extraordinary. Southward turned white; poured

out a glass of water hastily and drank it down in great gulping swallows.

"Why, Southward!" Hester exclaimed in surprise, "I hadn't the remotest idea that it would have such an effect on you. I'm sorry I told it."

"It's nothing," Southward exclaimed hastily. "Nothing whatever—except imagination. I couldn't help thinking how that girl felt when she saw the man lying—— But then my nerve isn't what it used to be. Do you remember the first night we got here how I waked you up screaming that the tall buildings were closing in on me?"

"Oh, yes, I remember," Hester said. "Still this isn't much like you, Southward, to get so white and trembly. Are you sure you're quite well?"

"Sure." And as though to prove it, Southward plunged into a racy account of her day's doings. Hester did not refer to Josie's story again.

CHAPTER XXII

With life bombarding her vigorously from every direction, Hester's aspect slowly changed. Erectness conquered the droop in her carriage, alertness overcame the lassitude in her expression. She still showed the air of one a little dazed by the clamour all about her, of one who awaits some rescuing event. From time to time, John said to her, "How about it, Hester? Do you still feel yourself on the outside of life?"

"Quite as much as ever," Hester invariably answered.

But after a while, John added, "That may be, Hester, but you're certainly putting on flesh."

A visit to the scales in the butcher-shop confirmed this surmise. Her figure gained grace and authority under this process.

As spring came, she saw less and less of Edith. For Edith was going with greater regularity now to the home of her dying aunt. These visits were always followed by a depressing lassitude which kept her in bed for a day or two. Sometimes Hester did not get a chance to see her between visits.

"I wish if that aunt of hers is going to die, she'd do it to-day," Hester kept saying to Rena Osgood. "She'll kill Edith if something doesn't happen soon."

Now, however, when Hester referred to the state of Edith's health, Rena always turned her head away; made some evasive answer. Occasionally Hester discussed the matter with Ripley who showed a helpless concern; but more often with John.

"Rena's right," John always said. "We can do nothing until the aunt is dead. You can't argue with Edith when it's a point of family duty. She has only this one near relative and she'll see it through if it kills her. But the instant the funeral is over, I'll—we'll pick Edith up and take her off bodily to some quiet place where she can relax and rest."

Hester's talks with John always opened with a consideration of Edith's welfare; often they closed with it. John indeed could give her later reports than she could get from anybody else. He called at Edith's house once every day it seemed. Sometimes this call came during his lunch hours; sometimes during the afternoon, sometimes in the evening, but it never failed. In his walks with Hester, his eye was always out for what would interest

or entertain Edith. A picture in some out-of-the-way art window, an antique in a distant second-hand shop, a glint of river or harbour, a jumble of sky-tearing architecture—he stored them all up for her.

Edith left New York early in March and went to live with her aunt. Now her only communication with Hester or even John was an occasional confused, long-distance telephone talk or her brief letters jotted in pencil, often smudged with haste and almost incoherent.

“I’d like to go to see Edith,” John said, “but she refuses to let me come. Apparently she doesn’t want me to stay in the house, and I think she’s afraid that her relatives might find it a queer situation if I stayed at the hotel. It’s a small place and full of gossip of course.”

Apparently however, all the time he had given to Edith he now transferred to Hester.

Spring had come with all her accustomed coyness of approach. She advanced; she retreated. She made a hundred sounding promises, redeemed none of them and then suddenly inundated the world with passionate devotion. March that year came in like a lamb and went out like a gazelle. The sky was heavy with soft white clouds which, parting, displayed summer’s own blue or, concentrating, produced faint showers that hung over the world like a golden mist. On clear days, the brilliant New York air seemed to hold a rose-coloured tinge. The nights surged with stars. There was something of faery about the world. John often called on Hester in the early morning, on his way to the office, making a wide *détour* for that purpose. He brought her spring flowers; sometimes he took her to lunch; sometimes to dinner. And as the month went by, he became more and more likely to do two of these things; and once he did all three. Their intimacy had reached that point that they met sometimes without greeting, merely turning together into accustomed ways. And often in the midst of their most interesting and interested conversations came intervals of understanding quiet.

At her mother’s command—it was accompanied by a re-enforcing money-order,—Hester bought herself some new things. Maud Morpeth made the clothes and Ellen Day the hat. In a suit—whose lines were designed for her figure—of heavy reseda-green silk with a cream-coloured blouse, trimmed with butter-coloured lace and a hat whose shape was designed for her head, wide, drooping, foliage-trimmed, Hester was for the first time in her life a figure of quiet elegance.

"You remember what I told you about yourself in Shayneford," John never forgot to say. "It's coming more true every day."

And indeed, just as the spring thrilled the earth, it seemed to thrill Hester. It flowed through her—that vernal impulse—in a fire that broke out on her face in waves of mounting colour that pulsed through her hair in waves of deepening flame. She was quicker in her movements now; more nervously alert. She flashed about at the sound of her name. Her face bore an eternal look of expectancy. Late in March came an interval of intense premature heat in which the city seemed actually to wilt. Summer dresses appeared and during the evenings the wide steps of the big old houses were filled with people vainly trying to get a breath of air. And in this heat, Southward departed for Shayneford. During her absence John came for Hester every evening.

"Where shall we walk?" he asked always.

"Where it's quiet," Hester invariably answered. Off the beaten track they wandered now constantly, her arm in his; along favourite paths in the park or beside the river. They laughed and talked at a feverish pace or kept silent with somehow an effect of even greater psychological speed.

Then one twilight, the fresh young crescent moon appeared like a coquettish apparition in the western sky. It rocked for a few nights, a silver arc in a peacock-blue sky, tagged everywhere by an evening star. They watched it grow through a misty, honey-coloured adolescence to a ruddy round maturity. "Hester," John said one night watching the moonlight wash over her uplifted, gold-framed face, "you are beautiful."

Hester's lids sank.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed as though involuntarily.

John did not refute her. But the next night, he said abruptly again, "Hester, you are beautiful."

This time Hester's lids only half-sank. But midway in the process, they came up and her eyes looked steadily into his.

"Thank you, for thinking so," she breathed.

The next night, John said for the third time. "Hester, you are beautiful."

This time her lids did not even flutter. She smiled and perhaps for the first time with a sense of triumphant assurance.

"I'm glad," she said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next morning, John called Hester up to tell her that he was going out of town for a day and a night.

"It looks as though you were going to be all alone this day," John commented. "My advice to you is to get some much needed rest."

But Hester did not rest. An excitement perhaps left over from the night before drove her into action. She put the flat to perfect rights, went out and ordered groceries and provisions. Then she washed her hair and this—considering its mass—was a process far from restful. She went up on the roof to dry it. In the soft sunshine which still continued and in the faint breeze which maintained itself perpetually at that height, it soon dried. She came down holding two great billowing, sparkling masses, one over each arm.

The buzzer hummed for a moment. It was time for the boy to deliver the things she had bought. Without bothering to talk through the tube, Hester pressed the button which would open the door. Advancing to the mirror, she contemplated with a frank pleasure what the air and sunshine had done to her. She was wearing a slim white morning dress of which the sleeves came only to the elbow and the neck formed a square. Once she would not have worn such a gown, but the addition in her weight had made its style becoming. Her long white arms had rounded; her hands showed a faint plumpness. Her cheeks had turned a deeper pink from the wind, her eyes a warmer blue.

There came a knock on the outer door.

"Come in," she called absently. And then as the front door opened and shut, "Put the things on the table, please, Tony."

"It's not Tony," John's voice called from the hall. "My old plute wired me to meet him in New York, and we did our business in fifteen minutes. He's going to put some money in *Tomorrow*. I thought I'd—my God!"

He stopped in the doorway. Hester had turned, presenting full to him a face that suddenly bloomed with smiles and blushes from the midst of twin cascades of gold.

John stood an instant, staring. Then he advanced swiftly; seized her. Hester's white arms dropped the heavy masses of her hair, crept about his neck as she lifted her lips to his kiss.

Suddenly John flung himself away from her.

"Forgive me, Hester," he groaned. "I have no right to do this. I couldn't help it. It got beyond me. But I haven't the right."

Hester stood where he had left her, her hands hanging by her side, her hair rippling nearly to the ground. She smiled and her smile had the delicious sweetness of the woman confident of her triumph.

"But you love me, John."

"Yes, I love you."

"And you know that I love you."

"Yes, I know that."

She waited. Her hair falling about her enclosed her as with a glistening golden mail, solid except where the pink-nailed tips of her beautiful hands cut through. Between its folds, she still smiled deliciously.

"What is it, John?" she asked.

But her question was languid, perfunctory even. Triumph surged into her voice. John was silent. But manifestly not because he did not want to answer her, because he was so spell-bound by that delicious smiling confidence, that rose-coloured mounting triumph.

"Are you married, John?"

"No."

"Is there any woman to whom you owe marriage?"

"No."

"Are you bound to any woman?"

John answered directly, "No." Then after a pause. "Not in the way you mean."

"And yet you're not free?"

"No, I'm free—and I'm bound."

He stood still looking at Hester and she stood motionless looking at him. And in that long silence, something obviously at first only a tiny ripple of suspicion grew to a bounding wave, swelled to an encompassing tide, crashed on her consciousness in a flood of conviction. That rose-coloured triumph receded from Hester's air; that delicious smile dried on her lips.

"It's Edith," she announced with certainty. "Tell me about it."

John looked about helplessly. "Let's sit somewhere," he suggested. "It's a long story. Yes, it's Edith."

He led the way to Southward's room. He seated himself on the couch there and drew Hester by a thick strand of her hair to his side. He held this strand while he talked.

"It's such a long story—and so confused—I don't know how to tell it exactly. Perhaps I'm a cad to tell it at all. But there are some circumstances in which codes have to go down. This is one of them. And I must make you understand, if I can. For you are the woman I love. I shall always love you."

He stopped and tried to collect his thoughts.

"It goes back to my very birth. You see I don't know who I am. I was found on somebody's doorstep and sent to a foundling asylum. They never could trace my parents. Nobody knows. That's never bothered me particularly. I don't care—never have. But that's why I'm John Smith. That's the name they gave me in the home. I lived in the institution until I was twelve. Then Edith, a very young and beautiful girl of twenty-two, came to visit the place. She saw me; took a fancy to me. She came again and again. In the end she carried me home with her. She never adopted me legally, but I always thought of her as a mother. She was a very stately young woman, appearing to me, a child, much older than she really was. And in fact, I think she did look older than she was. She dressed in an older fashion than she does now. Anyway she had a great deal of dignity and poise. She had always had a lot of money and she was accustomed to managing for herself. That gave her an air of authority. She took me away to a place she had hired for the summer in the Berkshire hills. She said she was going to send me to school in the fall. But when the fall came, she didn't do that. She was an orphan and, except for this old aunt that's dying, with only a few far-away relatives. She was lonely and I think she got accustomed to having me about; she didn't want to give up the companionship. Every summer she made plans for sending me away to school but when the time came she never did it. I was contented enough. I'd had enough of institutions. I thought school would be like the place I had left, and besides she hired all kinds of tutors for me. She had a wonderful library. We lived everywhere; for two years we travelled abroad. Of its kind of course, it was a remarkable education. It might have become over-feminised. But the tutors tended to correct that tendency."

He paused and looked off into space as though examining critically something he saw there.

"I can't tell you how beautiful Edith seemed to me. Or what an angel of gentleness and kindness. In fact, I don't have to tell you anything about her. You know as well as I do. If I tried to enumerate all the things she's done for me, I couldn't possibly do it. If I spent the rest of my life trying to repay her, I couldn't possibly do that. Of course, living in an institution, I had never known the kind of affection she offered me. It seemed heaven to me. I had always been a little undersized. The first effect of the good living she gave me—the out-of-door life, exercise, nourishing food—was that I suddenly began to shoot up. At fourteen I was a man. I guess I would have been in any circumstances an affectionate, easily-bossed kind of beggar, the clay-in-the-woman's-hands sort of duffer. And given that disposition, you can easily see how I would respond to Edith's affection. I worshipped her. I was as lazy as most boys, but I liked to wait on her. I can remember that first year when she came into my bedroom to kiss me good night. Her wonderful evening gowns, her jewels, her exquisite sculpturesque neck and arms, her shining eyes, her lovely hair, the perfume she used—well, she was reading George Macdonald to me then and she was all the beautiful women in his stories. She was North Wind and Daylight, the Princess in the Curdie books and the Fairy Godmother too."

He stopped again. With his left hand, he seized another strand of Hester's hair. And as he talked, he plaited and unplaited the two locks. Hester sat immobile, listening attentively.

"I don't know when it first began to dawn on me that her affection for the little boy she had befriended had developed into something deeper. Of course that bringing up had made me an innocent, modest little chap, virginal as any girl. I can't tell you when I first began to feel bothered or how the suspicion grew. I can't tell even you, what made it certainty. Those years are confused. As I look back on them I get only a sense of psychological upheaval and trouble. And then bang—there it was! A situation that floored me completely, that I had no idea how to cope with."

"You mean she fell in love with you," Hester said succinctly, "but you didn't fall in love with her."

John shifted uneasily. "I suppose that's it," he admitted. "You don't know what a rotter I feel to be saying anything like this about Edith. However the first effect on me at fifteen

was a wild interval when I tried to be as masculine as possible. I just naturally reached out for anything that would counteract this engulfing—and rather perfervid—femininity. I went to a gymnasium and I tried to break every record that was. I did break one or two. I ran and jumped and swam and boxed. And fight! Why, Hester, from being the mildest little shaver who was ever tied to a woman's apron-strings, I got to be the most persistent fighter. I'd fight anybody. I'd fight at the drop of a hat. I went out of my way to provoke fights. I'd fight my weight in wildcats. The next and most important effect was that I wouldn't let Edith spend any more money on me. I still lived with her, but I found a job. When I was eighteen, the situation was getting beyond me—and I beat it to New York; got one job and another job and another until after ten years I landed on *Tomorrow*. For five years I didn't let Edith know where I was. But as I got interested in the various forms of social rebellion, it occurred to me that the solution of her problem was to get out of herself. I wrote her a long letter in which I told her all this and begged her to come to New York to live. She came."

John paused for a longer interval. And in that pause, the inner tumult which had lined his face and brought the grey to his temples broke into a blaze.

"I don't know but what that was the worst thing I could possibly have done for her. It didn't work at all. She is always a very angel of kindness and squareness in her personal relations; she is instinctively charitable. But that lets her out. She can't for the life of her interest herself in impersonal movements. You see she has cultivated fastidiousness all her life, until she's the victim of it. Then seeing me again seemed to fix her in the habit of me. She depended on me more and more; began to lose her head. I often threatened to go away for good. But she said if I did—— In the end of course I didn't. And there it rests."

"You can't love Edith," Hester said.

"A man may not love his mother," John answered solemnly. "I love her too much in my way to love her even a little in her way. It would be sacrilege, profanation, incest. I could not do it. And so I've lived for these years in New York. I don't pretend that I've lived an ascetic life. Far from it. But I've never permitted myself to get involved with any woman. I couldn't marry Edith but I made up my mind that I wouldn't marry anybody else. Of course it's cut me out of matrimony. Not that I care a damn. I don't know that I'm such a domestic kind of guy."

That's never pinched. It's also cut me out of love. I'm glad of that now, because it led up to you. I've never really cared until I met you, Hester. And of course I thought I never was going to tell you. But when you came towards me with your hair down, looking as you did that night at the camp at Shayneford when I fell in love with you—I love you, Hester. I want to marry you. And I can't."

Hester's eyes had grown dull and sombre; the blush had faded from her cheeks. "I love you, John," she said quietly. "And I want to marry you. But I can't."

Suddenly she arose and moved about the room. But she walked with none of her old-time languor; she walked with an extraordinary vigour: she strode. When she turned to him, her eyes flared with starry resolution.

"I've been trying to think out what my duty is," she began suddenly. And her voice rang. "I couldn't make up my mind for a minute that I ought to tell you. It came to me the instant you began to speak. And now I see plainly that you must know. John, Edith takes some drug—ether, I think."

John stared at her for a dumb moment. His stare grew from stupefaction to horror; changed to certainty. He leaped to his feet with an inarticulate exclamation.

"She's been taking ether for," Hester's voice vibrated, "oh, I don't know how long."

"By God, you're right, Hester. You're absolutely right. What an ass I've been not to suspect it. How did you find it out?"

"That night she stayed with us at Shayneford. I was waked in the middle of the night by a smell of ether in the air. She slept out of doors on the balcony, but the wind brought it to me. It was only an instant and I didn't recognise the odour as ether. But I was uneasy and got up and went out to see if she was all right. She was apparently sleeping peacefully and I forgot all about it. The night I spent at her house when we first got here, the same thing happened. But I never put two and two together until you started to tell your story."

"Does anybody else know?" John asked.

"Rena Osgood. She's never spoken of it to me. But I realise now that she has suspected for a long time. It's strange. Everything has got clear to me in the last five minutes. I think Rena is preparing to open the subject to me. She's the one to take care of Edith if anybody does. She'll cure her if it can be done. You must get to Rena at once, John. And from her to Edith."

"I'm going right up to see Rena now," John said. "Then I'll

go out to see Edith. Don't leave this place. I'll telephone you sometime this afternoon. Of course I've got to attend to this matter at once. But to-night I want to have a long talk with you. You know, Hester, we've got something to thrash out between us that will take many hours. For remember I love you."

"All right, John," Hester answered.

After John left, Hester sat by the window for a long time. Then she sought the janitor. "If anybody calls on me," she said to him, "I want you to say that I'm out of town and won't be back for three or four days. And please keep on doing this until I tell you otherwise."

Her next move was to take the receiver off the hook and place it on the telephone-box. It stayed there for days.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Southward walked into Long Lanes the next night, her grandfather was eating his dinner, as usual, alone with Charlotte.

"Well—good Lord!" he ejaculated, "where'd you come from, Southward?"

"New York," Southward answered gaily, kissing him and then Charlotte. "How are you, Cap'n?"

"Pretty well," answered Mr. Drake. "Why didn't you tell us you were coming? I'd have been up to the station to meet you."

"Thought I'd surprise you," Southward explained briefly.

"Besides Lysander's almost always there. He wasn't this time though, and I walked. How's grandmother?"

That question answered itself.

"Be that you, Southward?" came in surprised accents from the bedroom. "I'm not asleep. Come right in here this moment and let me look at you!"

Southward obeyed. She hugged her grandmother and kissed her again and again.

"Well, I declare," Mrs. Drake exclaimed, "if you ain't the most surprising girl! I'm glad to see you though and you certainly do look well. Is that a boughten waist or did you make it yourself? How long are you going to stay or have you come for good?"

"I've only come for a little visit. But I don't know how long I'm going to stay yet," was Southward's careless explanation. "How is everybody?"

"Pretty well now but there has been an awful lot of sickness about. That Mis' Ellis—you know the one—Mandy's second cousin from the West—dreadful ailing creature. Land, seems as though she had everything! Ulcerated tooth, neuralgia, then the *la grippe*. It didn't seem as if there was anything going, one time there, but what she got it. And old Captain Dodd has had his other leg cut off. Ain't that a dreadful shame? It does seem as though he'd had enough. And the Snow twins had measles—caught it from each other of course. I guess that's all." Mrs. Drake reeled off this list with a melancholy pleasure. "You been well, Southward? And how's Hester?"

"I'm always well," Southward answered, "and as for Hester, I never saw her looking finer in my life."

"That's good," Mrs. Drake approved. "Mis' Crowell comes over sometimes and reads her letters to me and I allus read yours to her, and so between us we get a good idea of what you two girls was doing. I never heard tell of such good times as you had—but I must say I couldn't see when you slept."

"How's Lysander?" Southward asked.

"Able to get out, I guess," Mrs. Drake emitted a spark of humour. "He's been away on and off. I don't know where he is now."

Southward helped Charlotte with the dishes and afterwards superficially to clean up. The house showed all the inevitable maladjustments of a place managed by a blind woman and a crippled man.

Southward made no comment; but, as far as she could, she brought into the chaos some of that systematic orderliness which she could develop in one instant and destroy in another. Then she led the way into Mrs. Drake's room; talked long and rapidly though ramblingly about her New York experiences. At about ten o'clock Mrs. Drake fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

"Don't go to bed yet, grandfather," Southward said as they tiptoed out into the dining-room. "I've got something I want to talk over with you and Charlotte." She closed the door leading to her grandmother's room, drew up chairs to the centre-table. "Sit down, please, and you too, Charlotte. Here, Charlotte."

Mr. Drake folded his crippled body into the capacious chair which Southward indicated.

"I know what it is," Charlotte burst out, before she settled herself, "you're engaged, Southward."

"Guess again, Charlotte!" Southward said with a swift glimmer which lost itself in seriousness. "No, nothing like that. There's a big German oculist in Boston," she explained immediately, "one of the most famous men in his line in the world. I've come back here to get Charlotte and take her up to Boston and have him examine her eyes."

Charlotte's body jerked in a start so convulsive that it jarred the table. "My eyes—my—oh, Southward, *Southward*, do you think there's any chance that—oh, do you think there is?"

"I don't know," Southward answered briefly, "I don't *know* anything. But I want to find out for sure. Anyway we're going to take the chance. That's what I've come home for. I had a

talk with Greinschmidt yesterday afternoon in Boston. I'd long-distanced to make the appointment."

"Will it cost much?" Mr. Drake suggested cautiously.

"No," Southward vouchsafed non-committally. "That's all arranged. I'll take care of that. We'll go up Monday morning. He's to examine you Tuesday morning, Charlotte, and then if he thinks there's a chance, Wednesday, he'll—— Of course you realise it may mean an operation, Charlotte, but it isn't dangerous or painful or long."

Charlotte's hands clasped, tugged one at the other until her knuckles showed white. "I don't care what it means—or how hard or long or painful it is—if I can only see again. Just think of it! To see folks—why, Southward, I haven't ever really seen you."

"Well, I'm a great sight—believe me." Southward's tone held a note of premeditated lightness.

"Do you think it will be successful, Southward?" Charlotte's question was a plea for encouragement.

"I don't know," Southward answered inflexibly again, "and I'm not making any guesses. Of course I hope for the best. But, at the worst, the operation will do no harm and it may do all that we want."

"How long will it take?" Mr. Drake asked.

"About two weeks," Southward answered. "I'm going to take Sue-Salome up to Boston with us. And I'll have Libbie come over and stay here. There ought to be more than one of us to take care of Charlotte, although as I understand it, she won't be in any special pain. It's just a matter of her having company."

"You'll stay with me until they take the bandages off, Southward," Charlotte entreated.

"I'll stay with you until you're able to see," Southward promised, "or you're in the same condition that you're in now."

"It will be great to have Charlotte seeing like the rest of us," Mr. Drake said heartily. "That'll make some difference in this household."

Charlotte emitted a long tremulous sigh. But Southward arose and stretched and yawned. "I'm as tired as a dog. I'm going to bed this moment and you can take my word for it, I'll sleep. I expect you won't close your eyes to-night though, Charlotte."

"I expect I won't," Charlotte answered. "But I shan't mind, it's so wonderful to think——" Her voice ended in another long tremulous sigh.

"I guess I'll get up and go to church to-morrow," Southward

said, yawning again as she started upstairs. "That's the quickest way I know of finding out what's happened in this burg during my absence. Do you want to go too, Charlotte?"

"Yes," Charlotte answered mechanically, rousing herself from that vision her blind eyes saw.

"All right," Mr. Drake agreed. "I'll harness up and take you two girls over. I reckon it won't do me any harm to go to meeting."

He waited until Charlotte had gone to bed; then came to Southward's room for further particulars. Southward gave him an explicit account of her talk with Greinschmidt. "If you need extra money," Mr. Drake said as he left, "don't hesitate to wire me, Southward."

Southward's appearance in church the next day made a sensation. She sat in the Drake pew, well up towards the front of the church, with Charlotte drooping on one side and Mr. Drake hunched on the other. She was an apex during the entire service of surreptitious scrutiny from the back. Mrs. Wallace surveyed her from time to time with her quick darting glances that were more like the shooting forward of a forked tongue than the exercise of vision. Mrs. Tubman's round good eye fixed upon her while the other oscillated with that swift revolving movement which, with her, always indicated mental excitement. Mrs. Peters stared over her nose at regular intervals.

At the door, a group gathered about her.

"Well, how are you, Southward?" Mrs. Wallis asked.

"Oh, very well, thank you," Southward answered with a languid indifference so carefully studied that it amounted to a direct insolence.

"And how is Hester?" Mrs. Wallis went on, ignoring the indifference except for one glance forked with venom. "You look kinder dragged out—seems to me."

"Oh, Hester's looking fairly wonderful," Southward replied. "I've never seen such a change in any girl in my life."

"We've heard about some of the good times you were having in New York." Mrs. Wallis continued to hold the conversational reins. "How's Josie Caldwell?" she shot suddenly.

"Very well the last time I saw her," Southward responded, "that was in Shayneford—four years ago last summer."

"Are you going to stay for a while, Southward?" Mrs. Peters edged in, "or are you going right back?"

"I'm going to stay only a day," Southward rejoined carelessly. "Charlotte and I are going off though for a little trip to-morrow."

"*Charlotte!*" Mrs. Tubman repeated bluntly. "What's Charlotte going away for?"

"Just a little vacation," Southward dropped airily.

The girls had now come down from the choir-loft—Pearl and Pinkie and Flora, Aggie Bassett and Myra Rowell. Esther and Mercy joined them at the foot of the stairs. They surrounded Southward.

"Do tell us about New York!" Flora said. She looked radiantly happy; bright-eyed, pink-cheeked. "I suppose you've been seeing a lot of those people who camped out here last summer?"

"Oh, land yes," Southward was still airy. "All the time. Yes, they've been good to us and they certainly know how to live. It's a gay life though."

"Yes, that's what we hear," Mrs. Wallis managed to slip into the conversation again. "We get nothing but stories of how gay you are there."

"They can't possibly exaggerate it," Southward said, a faint glimmer coming into her eyes.

"Is Hester going to marry that Mr. Smith?" Mrs. Peters demanded.

"If she is," Southward answered, "she hasn't told me."

"Well, is he attentive to her?" Mrs. Tubman re-enforced Mrs. Peters. "Does he beau her round?"

"He's very kind to us both," Southward returned. "He's done everything he can to make our stay pleasant. Yes, he takes Hester about. But so does Mr. Fearing. And others."

"How's that Mr. Cameron?" Pearl inquired. "He's about the most awful flirt I ever met in my life. I don't suppose there's an instant in his life that he's not carrying on with at least three girls."

Southward contemplated Pearl's pink-and-white combination of spite and vacuity. Above the patchy bloom of her cheeks, Pearl's eyes were set in deep shadows as though she had not slept for a long time. But back of the gleam in her eyes showed an emotion akin to the triumph that shone behind Southward's malicious glimmer. As the two girls looked at each other sparks of antagonism shot back and forth.

"He was in the best of health and spirits when I saw him last," Southward replied.

"Is he coming down here next summer?" Pearl inquired further.

"Says he is," Southward answered with indifference.

"And that Miss Hale?" Flora asked eagerly. "How is she?"

I liked her better than any of them. She was always so sweet to everybody. And so beautiful. She always looked kinder delicate though. I sort of thought she was coming down with something. I hope she's all right."

"She's all right as far as I know," Southward responded. "But she still looks delicate. She never seems to be ill—actually ill, I mean. I think she's one of those people who don't ever look as strong as they really are. I haven't seen you, Flora, since the great event. How are you and how's King? I've got a pair of wedding-gifts in my trunk from me and Hester. I'll come round sometime late this afternoon and bring them to you. Charlotte and I start early to-morrow morning."

"Where you going?" Mrs. Peters asked with an accent of irritation.

"Boston first," Southward informed her briefly. "After that—well, I don't know yet."

"How's that Mr. Fearing?" piped up little Mercy Brewster, her big eyes shining through her big glasses. "I thought he was simply grand!"

Southward laughed. "He's well. I didn't know you had a crush on him, Mercy!"

"I didn't have a crush on him," Mercy declared indignantly. "I thought he was the most wonderful man I ever met in my life, though."

"That's a fine beginning for a crush," Southward said encouragingly. "Want me to take a message to him, Mercy?"

"Yes," Mercy defied her. "Tell him to come back here."

"How's that New York widow," Mrs. Wallis returned to the charge, "that fast-looking thing that used to make up so?"

"In the best of health," Southward maintained, "as fast-looking as ever, quite as much made up and apparently a great success socially."

"That mother of hers," Mrs. Peters put in, "Mis' Boardman—worn't that the name?—was a queer thing. I've always wondered how those two women lived."

"Like every other woman you know," Southward answered readily, "either on the money that some man gives them, husband or father, or on what they earn themselves. These ladies are both widows. Mrs. Morrow is, I believe, independent. Her mother makes a living selling antiques."

"I never see anybody so persistent as that Mis' Boardman," Mrs. Tubman asserted with indignation. "Every time she saw

me, she tried to get me to sell her my Grandmother Fletcher's melon chair. I'd just about as soon think of selling Flora."

"Mrs. Boardman's antique business seems to be a big one," Southward explained. "And she is certainly a wonder for picking up old furniture and making it look lovely. You ought to see what she did with Gert Beebee's bureau."

"Oh, Southward, what did you and Hester say when you heard of Gert Beebee's marriage?" Pinkie Peters exclaimed. "Weren't you surprised?"

"Not especially," Southward said in the languid tone which in her case often accompanied a direct lie. "We were expecting something like that. Which reminds me that I've got to get round to see Gert this afternoon. I've got wedding-presents for her too."

"Well," Aggie Bassett contributed as the group broke up, "you can talk all you want about Mr. Cameron and Mr. Smith and Mr. Fearing—but I think that Mr. O'Reilly was the handsomest man I ever laid my eyes on."

After dinner, that day, Southward took Charlotte with her while she drove from house to house making her short, exciting, talk-laden calls.

"Now, Cap'n," she said as she departed on this expedition, "while I'm gone, you tell grandmother about what I'm going to do with Charlotte; and answer as many of her questions as you can; for I'll have to answer a small million everywhere I go this afternoon."

But when she returned, it was apparent that Mr. Drake had managed only to stem the tide. She sat with Mrs. Drake for half an hour and submitted to interrogative bombardment with the humorous patience which she reserved for her grandmother alone. Afterwards she retreated to the dining-room and wrote letters. Charlotte sat with Mrs. Drake. At times, Southward's pen came up and stopped as she listened, glimmering, to the monologue that Charlotte delivered.

"We certainly have flaxed round this afternoon," Charlotte began. "First we went to Mis' Crowell's and Southward told her every living, breathing thing she could think of about Hester. Mis' Crowell asked her more'n a million questions."

"It's queer how many questions some folks can ask," Mrs. Drake remarked. "My sister Sabry used to say half of them jest asked them so's to hear themselves talk. They don't listen to the answers at all."

"Southward was mighty good. She answered them all just as patient. And you know how she hates to answer questions."

"Hardest girl to get anything out of that she don't want to tell of anybody I ever saw in my life," Mrs. Drake declared.

"Mis' Crowell thinks that that John Smith is sweet on Hester. She didn't say so but you could see it, and she tried every way she knew how, to make Southward say it. But Southward wouldn't. She didn't say he worn't. But I bet you a hat she doesn't think he is."

"Yes, of course, Mis' Crowell would like that," Mrs. Drake murmured. "She's an awful proud woman—Abbie Crowell. She'd hate to have her daughter be an old maid. What I'd like to know, is that Mr. Cameron waiting on Southward?"

"Well, of course Southward's never *said*. You know how she is. But I guess he is, fast enough. Most every man who's ever seen her has fallen in love with her."

"Yes, she's very attractive to gentlemen," Mrs. Drake agreed. "I was too when I was a young girl. Land, I could have married half a dozen. And as for my sister Sabry—I guess Sabry couldn't count the men she'd said no to—great strapping handsome fellows too. Queer, she'd marry a little pindling fellow like Douglas, now worn't it? Where'd you go next?"

"Well, then we went round to Matthew Hallowell's. Southward had a great time there. She laughed and joked and she told Mr. Hallowell a whole mess of stuff that I didn't understand about—meetings and things like that. Matthew just sat up and drank it down. He said one queer thing, 'Southward,' he says, 'have you or Hester exploded yet?' And Southward says, 'No, not yet. We've been too happy and we haven't had time.' And he said when he exploded from the ministry, it worn't a question of time. Awful funny thing to say, worn't it? *Exploded!* Then from there, we went to Flora Tubman's—I mean Curtis—seems as if I never could remember her married name—and Southward left the wedding-presents. Flora was tickled to death with the bread-and-butter plates—and I guess they were handsome from what folks say. I never saw Mis' Tubman more pleasant to Southward. Then from there we went to Gertie Beebee's—I mean Gertie Welch's. Don't it seem queer her having another name? Well, she and Southward just talked and talked. You could scarcely hear what they was saying, they went so fast and laughed so much. The baby was asleep when we got there but it woke up before we left. Gertie said Southward had got to hold the baby or she'd be mad. Southward said she'd rather hold a rattlesnake,

but Gertie jest dumped it right down in her lap. Of course I couldn't see what they was doing but I was afraid they'd hurt the baby between them. Southward didn't seem to mind it so much, once she got the baby in her arms. But she didn't hold it very long. She handed him over to me. My grief, but he's a strong little tyke! He hit with his hand against my face as hard as though he was beating a drum. And once he got hold of my hair and Gertie had to take him away, he pulled it so. Gertie was tickled to death too with the wedding-presents Southward and Hester sent her. She put the tea-set on the table in the parlour and said she was going to have tea every afternoon just like the swells and she and Southward hung the picture Hester gave her. She said she was awful sorry that Buster—as she calls him—was away. Seems he's in training—that means getting ready for one of those prize-fights. They have to do exercises all the time and they can't eat only certain things and go to bed at a regular time and their wives never go to stay with them—must be an awful dull time for him. Southward said she was going to ask him to teach her how to box sometime. She said she could shoot a gun and why shouldn't she know how to use her fists. Ain't Southward the queer creature? But she's the best girl I ever knew," she added loyally.

Mrs. Drake asked many questions. Charlotte filled in these free outlines with a mass of disconnected detail. Mrs. Drake drank her narrative down as though it were a rare wine.

After a while Southward gave her whole attention to her letters.

"Dear Hetter," the first one, which was brief, began, "I've seen your mother and she's well, in the best of spirits. Of course she asked a billion questions and I answered with more patience than I have shown in the whole course of my life before. She said again and again that you *were not* to come home until you wanted to. She said if your money gave out, she would send you another hundred dollars. Of course it was all I could do to keep from breaking out in wild whoops of joy when I heard that. We're going to stay—you bet! To-morrow Charlotte and I start on our great surgical adventure. You can have some idea of my state of mind in regard to it, when I tell you that every time I think of it, I come as close to praying as I ever have come since I stopped demanding gifts of the Almighty. I will let you know how things are going."

The second letter was long. It was to Dwight. It began with a careful but succinct account of her talk with Greinschmidt.

But from that point it spread to many things. It ended, "I expect to be back in three weeks at the latest."

Two days later, Dr. Greinschmidt made his examination of Charlotte.

"It's a slow-growing tumour," Southward wrote in half a dozen letters, "on the brain, pressing on the optic nerve. Dr. Greinschmidt's operation is a new one made through the nasal passage. The old operation was bloody and in many ways more dangerous, as the brain had to be lifted up and the operator worked more in the dark. It also left a scar. In this new operation, made by lifting the lip, the operator gets a clearer vision; there's a thinner plate of bone to pierce and he comes into more immediate contact with the tumour; less bleeding, irritation, and destruction of tissue. Greinschmidt will *say* nothing encouraging, but I *know* he's hopeful."

The next day, the operation was performed, pronounced successful.

A week later, Southward took Charlotte to Shayneford in a closed limousine. A nurse accompanied them. At the end of of another week, the nurse removed the bandages.

Charlotte saw.

CHAPTER XXV

CHARLOTTE'S recovery was a little better than normal. After the first two weeks, Southward and Sue-Salome between them undertook the care of her. Each day lightened this task. And now that she had accomplished her great feat, Southward's characteristic restlessness, informed by some emotion obviously deeper, took possession of her.

"How much longer you going to stay, Southward?" Mrs. Drake asked once.

"About a week," Southward answered. But, "I don't think I'll stay the whole week out," she said at breakfast-table Sunday morning. "Charlotte is doing so well and Sue-Salome is proving so capable and ready for anything. She's much better for her than I am. I'm such an energetic thing. Besides there's a lot of things I should be attending to in New York. I think I'll go Friday."

"You'll be down pretty soon, I expect," Mr. Drake said.

"Pretty soon," Southward returned evasively. "I think I won't stay until Friday," she said next morning. "I do feel as if I ought to go back to New York. I guess I'll go Thursday."

But Wednesday morning, when she came down to breakfast, she was dressed with particular care. "I think I'll take the morning train up. I'll just catch the Limited."

"Well, I guessed you'd go before you said," Mr. Drake commented in a tone of resignation. "I could see you were as restless as you could be."

"I'm kinder glad you're going," Mrs. Drake unexpectedly informed her. "For I feel the sooner you get back there, the sooner you'll get back here."

Charlotte's farewell was more protracted, interrupted by tears and many broken expressions of gratitude.

The arrangement was that Sue-Salome was to stay as long as Charlotte needed her.

Southward was silent in the carriage during the drive to the station, only breaking her grandfather's monologue with the *yes* or *no* that it required. She sat by the window all the way to Boston, an elbow resting on the sill, her chin peaked in her hand.

It was apparent, though, that her eyes saw nothing of the whirling scene on which they rested. A something dominated her which anybody studying her would have found there all the time since her return from New York. With people about, that something lingered in the background of her spirit; flashed through occasionally but only in an increased and more abrupt vivacity. Alone, it showed itself in sudden starts, in quick leaps to her feet, in prolonged pacing of the floor. To-day it came to the surface in a succession of smiles that seemed to tear their way to her lips; in a constant joyous humming; in the assurance, doubly assured, of her whole attitude.

That something was triumph.

To a close observer, that triumph should have been visible the day she arrived in Shayneford. It grew steadily every day of her stay there. It became almost a pæan of the spirit—evidenced in her brilliant eyes and her rippling lips—when each night she returned from the Post Office to her garret and read there the long letter she received from Dwight.

When she boarded the New York train, excitement re-enforced this certainty of triumph. Palpably she tried to control it. It kept getting beyond her however. Her feet began to tap the floor as her patience exploded in volleys of abrupt movements. She drifted from one side of the car to the other; looked out of this window, then another. She bought magazines and tried to read them. But her efforts ended in an absent scrutiny of the illustrations. In the dining-car she prolonged the business of eating as long as possible and succeeded admirably considering how little she ate. Once she actually drummed on the window-pane until the violent tattoo she was producing penetrated even her own consciousness and she stopped abruptly. At the Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street station she put on her hat and gloves; stood on the platform of the car during the slow toilsome progress downtown through the tunnel and into the Grand Central Station. But once in the street she drew into her lungs a long deep breath of New York air. When that deep inspiration left her lips, it seemed to bear with it all her restlessness; only triumph remained. She leaped into a taxi; gave the address of the model tenement; relaxed and sat lazily swaying to the motion, her eyes glued to the flashing New York scene, her lips smiling, her eyes sparkling.

At the outer door, her finger hovered an instant over the buzzer. Then with a mischievous glimmer, she withdrew it. She felt for the key in the little handbag she carried; opened the door. Despite the weight of the suitcase, she fairly bounded up the stairs. At

her own door, however, all speed went out of her. She put the suitcase down with exquisite care; noiselessly fitted the key in the lock; silently lifted the suitcase over the threshold, left it there. Still without a sound she closed the door and tiptoed down the hall. She glanced into her own empty room as she passed; glanced into Hester's. She advanced to the kitchen doorway, her hand putting the key in her bag.

There she stopped stockstill, petrified.

Dwight and Azile stood together in the middle of the room, Dwight's arms were about Azile; her head touched his shoulder, his lips swept her hair. Southward's hand clutched something inside her bag with a convulsive grip. As though that movement made sound, Dwight looked up. He stared at Southward, equally petrified, except that mechanically his arms fell away from Azile.

Azile turned too, and as she looked into Southward's face so blackly still and set, her own face blanched.

And then Southward's hand flashed out of her bag, levelled what she had clutched there.

Southward's shot and Azile's scream came simultaneously. Dwight swayed and fell backwards on the couch, carrying Azile with him. Southward turned. As noiselessly as she had come into the place, she sped away from it.

She picked up her suitcase as she ran.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE next morning Southward alighted from the train in the Shayneford station. Lysander was standing at the end of the platform holding his horse's bit. Late in the season as it was—the middle of April—a sudden change in atmosphere had brought the fall of an inch or two of snow. Lysander did not hear Southward's approach over the snowy platform. He stood moodily gazing in the other direction. Southward touched him on the shoulder.

"Good Lord, Southward!" he exclaimed, "where did you come from? I thought you were in New York."

"No," said Southward smoothly, glancing at the few people who had alighted from the train and were filing past. "I didn't go to New York after all." She talked with great clearness. "I went as far as Boston and then I got worried about Charlotte. I decided to come back and stay until she was perfectly well."

"Well, she's doing fine from all I hear," Lysander assured her. "I haven't seen her yet—didn't get home myself until yesterday. Get into the wagon, Southward. I'll take you home."

"Thanks," Southward said carelessly. And she climbed into the buggy, settled herself as far back in the corner as she could get. "I don't want anybody to see me if possible. I don't want to have to answer the million questions they'll ask." Leaning her head back against the buggy hood, she closed her eyes.

"You look tired, Southward," Lysander commented. "Didn't you have a good trip?"

"I didn't sleep very well," Southward admitted, "last night in Boston. Funny our having a snowstorm so late. I guess it's the record, isn't it? Beginning to melt already."

"Yes, this is the latest snow I ever saw," Lysander agreed. "It isn't the record though. My mother saw a snowstorm in Shayneford on the first of May once."

He started to turn in the direction of Long Lanes. Southward raised herself.

"I wish you'd take me over to Matt's first, Lysander. I want to talk with him for a few minutes. And I'd like you to be there."

"All right." Lysander added after a moment, "Nothing wrong, is there, Southward?"

Southward did not answer this question. And Lysander did not

He shot one or two stealthy looks at her. Southward now lay as still in her corner as though frozen there. Her eyelids down, her mouth set close, she was without colour or expression. Even her lips were putty. The effect of the disappearance of its rose-values was to bring out in a curious way the fineness of her skin. Her black eyelashes were so still that they might have been painted on that smooth, dark texture.

"Here we are, Southward," Lysander said at last.

Southward roused herself with something of her customary alertness; leaped out of the carriage, ran swiftly up the steps, along the walk to the piazza.

"Please come in, Lysander," she flung back over her shoulder. And Lysander followed her.

Matthew Hallowell, surrounded by his archipelago of chairs and tables, had already begun work. Stacks of papers covered the tables; piles of note-books the chairs. Files of books slanted from the bookcases along the carpet in his direction, as though they were charging him. The sunlight flooded through the long French windows, sparkled on his thick upstanding silver hair and in his frosty kindly blue eyes.

"Well, Southward!" he exclaimed. "Back again? You just spin between Shayneford and New York these days, don't you?"

Southward ignored this. "Mrs. Cahoon isn't in the kitchen, is she, Matt?" she asked.

"No, she's gone to her sister's as usual," Matthew answered. "She'll be here later. Why?"

"Are you alone in the house, Matt?"

"Yes. Why? Anything wrong?"

"I'll tell you," Southward assured him. "Sit down, Lysander."

Lysander who had stood impassive through this dialogue took a chair. Hallowell had not risen. Southward continued to stand.

"I shot Dwight Cameron yesterday in our apartment in New York," Southward said clearly. "I don't think I killed him, because there was nothing about it in any of the papers this morning. I think he will die though. I shot to kill—and I know how to shoot."

Her listeners did not stir or speak. But the intense gaze that they had fixed on her, at her first words, held there as though by an irresistible attraction. Lysander's colour did not change perceptibly. But Hallowell grew ashen. "Are you crazy, Southward?" he demanded. But this was palpably the first ejaculation of shock.

"I'm telling you the exact truth. I got to the apartment unex-

pectedly, not knowing he was there, thinking I would see Hester. I opened the door without making any noise and tiptoed into the kitchen, meaning to surprise her. Hester wasn't there. I don't know where she was. But he was there. How I can't understand. But in circumstances that—— Well, I shot him through the chest. I aimed for his heart."

She opened the little handbag she still carried, thrust her hand into it, and withdrew a revolver. While she spoke, she broke it and dropped four small cartridges onto the table. She counted them as they fell. "The other one's in him."

"God!" Hallowell groaned.

Lysander emitted a queer sound that, with another emotion driving back of it, might have been a laugh.

"I taught you to shoot," he said, "and I gave you that revolver. Give it to me."

"No. I'll keep it."

"Before God you won't!" Lysander ground between his teeth. He sprang suddenly upon her and seized the hand that held the revolver.

Southward did not resist. Only her hand closed on the butt. "Listen to me, Lysander." Her tone was low but clear. "The game's up. If he's dead I'm done for. They'll look here the first thing. I'm not running away. I came to you two because you are the only real friends I have in this town and I wanted somebody to have the story straight. And then when the big explosion comes, I want you, Matt, to explain it to the people at home. And I want you, Lysander, to keep this gang of hell-cats down here off them."

"I'll do that," Lysander promised grimly. He loosened his grip on Southward. "But what about self-defence, Southward? You shot him because he——"

"I shot him," Southward finished his sentence for him, "because at that moment I hated him more than any human being I ever saw in my life. There's nothing in the self-defence theory, Lysander. There was a witness."

"Man or woman?" Lysander asked.

"Woman," Southward answered briefly.

"God damn it!" Lysander started out of his chair. "Can't I go over there and get to her?"

"Not very easily," Southward replied. "She'd hang me with her own hands if she could."

Southward sat down. She was still cool. "I came here, Matt, for another reason. I want to ask a favour. I want you to let

them arrest me here. It will be an awful shock to poor grandmother. Grandfather will take it pretty hard too. But he'll understand. He knows in his own case what the Drake temper will do. I have always felt that my temper would be my ruin, but I didn't think—— Then there's poor Charlotte. Oh, I'm so glad I got her eyes fixed up before this happened! What I want to do, Matthew, is to stay right here until they come for me. No detectives were on my train. I'm sure of that. They'll get here on the afternoon train. Of course they'll go first to Long Lanes. Then they'll search the town. Only a few people saw me get into the buggy with Lysander. But by this time half the town knows that I'm back again and wondering what's the answer. All they've got to do is trace Lysander. You don't have to stay, Ly," she concluded.

"I'll stay," Lysander said briefly; and thought hard. "Southward," he burst out in another instant, "I think we can beat them yet. Let's take what food and money Matthew's got in the house and drive over to the Shayneford woods. I'll leave the carriage anywhere along the road. I'm sure I can get you across the Cape and into a boat somewhere."

"Can't be done, Ly," Southward decided decisively. "The whole place will be roused. Everybody would be beating the woods first thing. No. I thought it all out last night. We could delay the inevitable one day, or two, perhaps three. I'll admit I'd attempt it quick as a wink if we could get away with it. But we can't. So I'll pull it off with as much dignity as possible." She turned to Hallowell. "You've always said, Matt, that Hester and I would explode sometime. I've done it, you see."

Hallowell's underlip quivered like a child's. Southward went to him; threw her arms about his neck. "I'm sorry to have put you in this situation, Matt. But I did think you'd be willing to do it for me. You are, aren't you?"

"Of course I am," Hallowell said with an emphasis that rang through the tremble in his voice. "Of course I am. How I wish I could save you, my poor child."

"Nobody can do that." Southward disengaged herself lightly; took off her hat and coat. "Now I've told you all—not all there is to tell—but all I can tell—as much as I shall ever tell anybody—and more than I shall ever tell my lawyer or the jury. Let's dismiss the subject and busy ourselves with other things. Remember that one thing I have told you, you must never tell to any living human being—that there was a woman there. There's no reason why she should be drawn into it. You swear, Matthew?"

"I swear," Hallowell answered.

"And you, Ly?"

"I swear too," Lysander replied.

"Very well then," Southward commented. "That's all. Will you let me help you work the rest of the morning, Matt?"

"How can I work?" Hallowell asked. Two big tears rolled down his wrinkled cheeks.

"We can't sit here and just look at each other," Southward maintained inflexibly. "It will be easier after you get started. Come, Matt, read me what you've written. And when you need your next reference, I'll look it up and verify it."

By dint of her insistence, her dominating will-power, her capacity for concentration, she finally got Hallowell into his work, though he made one or two false starts. She looked up references for him; read passages from various authorities; took notes that he dictated. She asked him to dismiss the delighted Mrs. Cahoon and she herself prepared lunch for the two men. Afterwards they went to work again. Lysander in the meantime sat stark and still as a statue, staring blankly out the window from across the room; or examined the magazines that lay on the table; or pulled books from the shelves and tried to interest himself in their contents. His efforts were much less successful than Southward's. The crisp noon began to fade to mid-afternoon.

"That train will be in in half an hour," Southward said suddenly. "I shouldn't say that there'd be more than an hour of this waiting."

Ten minutes later Lysander jumped to his feet. "Here comes Bud Crosby's boy on a bicycle. He always brings telegrams. Yes, he's stopping here. You'd better go to the door, Matt. Don't say anything about Southward's being here."

Hallowell obediently opened the front door. From the window, Southward and Lysander watched him receive a little yellow envelope and sign for it. He came back into the living-room, tearing futilely at the flap with his trembling old fingers. Lysander seized it and tore it open in a single vigorous gesture; handed it back.

"It's from John Smith," Hallowell said. He read, "'Tell Southward everything all right here. Jungle Doc on the case. Patient doing well. Serious but not fatal. Shoulder. Will telegraph every day.'" He looked over his telegram and over his glasses at Southward. Lysander turned and looked too. And as they looked, Southward crumpled slowly and fell in a heap on the floor.

Half an hour later, "Now take me home, Ly," Southward ordered, "I've got to get some rest as soon as possible."

Characteristically however, she stopped and put the revolver with the four cartridges in her bag.

"I hope you won't ever carry that gun again, Southward," Lysander said. "Perhaps I'm not sorry I gave it to you."

"I shall never carry it again," Southward promised. "You may be sure of that."

She disdained Lysander's proffered assistance down the path, and when it came to getting into the carriage. But once there, she fell in a limp heap in the corner.

"Don't take me right home after all, Ly," she begged, and her voice began to break. "I'm not equal to seeing them yet. I can't talk with anybody. I'm at the end of my rope. Drive off down the lower road somewhere—take that lane that leads to West Shayneford. We won't see anybody there. That's right. Whip him up! You don't know what I've been through. I've lived in hell for a day and a half. If I had a drug I'd take it to-night—I don't want to think—I want to sleep for days and days—I don't want to think about myself." She sobbed.

"I'm a terrible woman, Ly—I'm a dangerous woman—any Drake is dangerous—that Drake temper makes dynamiters of us—when I think of grandfather's record—when I think what I've done—my heart turns over—my blood turns to water—I'm frightened, Lysander—I'm afraid of myself. I feel as if I were possessed by mania—I can't count on myself any more—I don't know what I'll do next—I've just missed being a murderess."

Her pants of breath were coming thicker and faster. The tears were pouring down her face. For a moment sobs choked her utterance. She struggled with her own words, seemed to strangle over them. Lysander took advantage of this interval to whip up his horse again. They flew through the main street; turned into the lower road and then into the little wooded lane that Southward had suggested. Lysander threw a steadying arm about her waist. And all the time she was talking.

"I don't know what's going to become of me—I don't know where I'll end up—I've proved that I can't be trusted—I need a master—I need a strong hand—I've never had that—I've never known a father—or a mother—grandfather's never crossed me—and I could always wind grandmother round my finger—and Charlotte's always been my care rather than me hers—I never got along with my teachers—I was always wilful and headstrong and disobedient—I've gloried in my ability to get my own way—I've ridden roughshod over everybody in this town—everybody except Hester—I've never considered anybody's feelings but my own—I

don't know what it is to think of anybody but myself—I'm frightened to death—I don't know what's going to happen to me—save me, Lysander—save me—save me—I've refused you a hundred times—but I'm sorry now—marry me, Lysander—please marry me—for God's sake, marry me."

Lysander withdrew his arm from Southward's waist. He propped her in the corner so that her drooping head was transferred from his shoulder to the buggy-hood. "Cut this out, Southward!" he commanded. "You'll be in no shape to go home for another hour if you don't get together."

"Marry me," Southward begged. "I want you to marry me, Lysander."

Lysander started as though he had been shot by one of Southward's own remorseless bullets. He stiffened. Then again he dropped what with another emotion back of it might have been a laugh. "My God, I'd forgotten clean," he muttered. "I've got to tell you something, Southward. It's a secret now. But everybody'll know to-morrow. This day's doings has put it out of my head completely. But I went over to Plymouth last night with Pearl Wallis and we got married."

The sun was just setting when Southward came walking up the North Lane to the house. As she entered the clearing in which stood garden, orchard, and between them the big Drake mansion, the west light was besieging the house. Southward stopped as instantly as though somebody had called her name. She stood for a moment, staring dully.

The snow had not entirely melted. It lay lightly over the roof and cornices. It glittered under the urge of the light. It rendered more brilliant the peacock-green of the old doors and blinds and it made more velvety the grey-white of the old clapboards. The windows were all ablaze, as though liquid fire were flooding from the inside out. It was very still. The box-hedges were moveless under their frail fleecy coverlets. The pointed firs, still whitely powdered on their shady sides, did not stir. As Southward stared, a bird detached himself from the wistaria vine and flew through the air, trailing a sheaf of gay notes. It was the only sound; the air seemed to close over it. The venerable house, beset both by spring and winter and beleaguered by the sunset light, stood mute, the prey of all these influences. Never before though had it been more dominantly itself; poignant and magnificent at once.

She made a brief explanation—her worry about Charlotte—of

her swift return from New York; assured herself of Charlotte's improvement; helped Sue-Salome with the dishes; talked as usual with her grandmother after dinner. At nine she said she was tired. Lighting her one candle and ignoring their protests that it would be too cold, she proceeded to the garret.

It was cold. Southward lighted a little kerosene stove, let it burn for an hour. She piled extra blankets on her couch. Once in bed, she sank into a stupor which rapidly became sleep. An hour later she awoke with a start, lay tossing restlessly; got up. She lighted her candle, and, holding it in her hand, hunted among the clothes which she had thrown restlessly hither and thither. Finally her eyes fixed on her handbag. She began to tremble but she opened it and took out the revolver. She put this on the table, while with fingers that grew more and more shaky she fumbled at the bottom of her bag. Finally she drew out the four cartridges.

Picking the revolver up, she moved over to the desk. She pulled down the slant top and removed a little drawer that stood between the rows of pigeonholes. Back of this drawer appeared another drawer. She removed that. In the depths of the new aperture gleamed a little brass spring. She pressed it. The bottom of the aperture flew open, revealing a second aperture. With a hand which shook violently as the result of the shudders now tearing her whole body, she deposited the revolver in the secret chamber and, one by one the four cartridges. Then she closed the aperture, put both the drawers back, closed the desk.

When she returned to bed she fell into a deep sleep. She slept late into the next morning.

CHAPTER XXVII

A TELEGRAM came every day for a week to Hallowell. On the third day arrived for Southward a brief note from John telling in a guarded way what had happened immediately after the shooting. Azile had shown remarkable presence of mind. She telephoned John's I. W. W. physician-friend. She happened to get him and he came immediately. In the meantime, with unexpected coolness and common sense, she rendered first aid. She also got Ripley within a few minutes; and John later. Ripley arrived five minutes after the doctor and John came before the doctor had left. In the doctor's presence, Azile said simply that Dwight had had a quarrel with a friend. The friend shot him. To John and Ripley she told the truth. An examination established at once that Dwight was in no immediate danger. The doctor advised keeping Dwight in the apartment.

Every alternate day John wrote Southward a long letter. These letters were typewritten and unsigned. The envelopes were typewritten. All these letters ended "Burn this"; and Southward, when she had read them three times, complied with the request. Her only letter in reply answered a question as to Hester's whereabouts. She stated briefly that she had heard only once from Hester. She had written that, feeling the need of change, she was starting on a little trip to Washington, perhaps to Baltimore, and possibly to Richmond. The trip had undoubtedly lengthened. At the end of a week, John's letter contained a hand-written note. It was in a scrawled pencil—from Dwight. Without reading it, Southward put it in an envelope, addressed it to Dwight; mailed it immediately. These pencilled notes continued to come for an interval; always they went back unread.

One afternoon Southward returned from a long walk, solitary except for the dogs, as all her walks were nowadays. The sound of voices came from her grandmother's room as she opened the door. When she entered, Azile Morrow, very trim in a cheviot suit, arose to meet her.

"How do you do!" Azile said. "I told your grandmother that I'd be the last person on earth you'd expect to see." She added with a swift brightness, "But mother wanted me to come down to the Cape to dig up some old furniture for her. I've been attending

to that. But I couldn't go away without seeing you. And then there are a lot of things I want to ask you. I'm so glad that I found you at home."

"I see," Southward showed a smooth hard composure. "I'm glad you came here immediately. You must stay with us as long as you remain in Shayneford."

"Thank you," Azile answered. "I will take advantage of your hospitality to-night. There are some things I must ask you at once," she went on insistently, "or as soon as we have the opportunity. I'm afraid I'll forget."

"After dinner perhaps," Southward suggested civilly. She turned to her grandmother. "I think we'd better put Mrs. Morrow in the southeast chamber."

"Yes," Mrs. Drake agreed, "that's what Charlotte and I decided. She's up there fixing it up and your grandfather's building afire. Mis' Morrow and Charlotte and I have been having a beautiful talk. Charlotte told her all about the operation. She's been telling me all about her mother's shop. Ain't she a smart woman? How I wish my sister Sabry could have heard about that. Sabry was a terrible capable critter. She always said she'd admire to have a store where she could sell them old antiques. I don't like old things myself. I like stylish new furniture. I've been asking Mis' Morrow about everybody—Miss Hale and Mr. Smith and Mr. Cameron, and Mr. Fearing, and especially Mr. O'Reilly. He was my favourite of all the gentlemen who came down here last summer. I liked Mr. Cameron too. An awful flirt, I should say though. Land, I've seen a lot of men like that in my young days. Always shining up to one or two or three girls at once. I guess I'd let everything he said come in one ear and go out the other. Handsome as a picture though."

Southward listened with a chill deference to her grandmother's opinions. Then she disappeared with a formal, "Excuse me," returning in a few moments with "Mrs. Morrow, your room is all ready now. Let me take you to it."

Mrs. Morrow silently followed Southward through the dining-room into the hall of the big main house and to the bedroom on the first floor which was closest to the ell.

It was a big square room, nobly proportioned as were all the rooms in Long Lanes. The woodwork was yellow with age, but beautifully carved; the paper not colonial but early Victorian of a simple pattern. The big canopied bed, the tall secretary, the table and chairs were all, though many of them in need of upholstery, of the best colonial period.

As they came in, Mr. Drake straightened up to his abbreviated full stature from the fireplace where high flames roared upwards in curling oak-leaves of light. Charlotte turned from her work at the bed to say:

"Now I've put fresh sheets and fresh comfortables on the bed, Mis' Morrow, and I don't see how there can be the least possible dampness. But I'm going to keep the clothes turned back for an hour or so jest to make sure. Then I'm going to slip some hot-water bottles in before you come to bed. And with the fire going, I'm sure you'll be as warm and dry as in New York."

"We've never had any trouble with dampness in this room," Mr. Drake explained. "And don't be frightened because you seem so far away. Southward's room is right alongside of you. And I'm within easy call."

"You're both very kind," Azile said graciously. "And I'm sure I shall be neither cold, damp, nor frightened. What a beautiful fireplace! Mother and I have never forgotten that personally-conducted tour you gave us through this house. We still remember it as one of the loveliest old New England places that we have ever seen."

"We'll leave Mrs. Morrow for a little while now," Southward suggested. "You'll find plenty of hot water on the stand here," she added, examining the supplies that Charlotte had brought, "and plenty of towels, I think. Take your time; we won't have dinner until half an hour at least."

She herded her grandfather and Charlotte through the door and followed in their wake.

She did not, as was her wont ordinarily, when company came to Long Lanes, supervise to the minutest detail the appointments of the table and the serving of the dinner. When half an hour later, in answer to the bell, Mrs. Morrow—still in the cheviot suit which she had worn in the train, but visibly combed, washed, and powdered—appeared in the dining-room, she sat down to a meal which was, except for the food, the replica of every one that Southward had eaten in the last month. The coloured cloth and napkins, blue woven with red, the bone-handled knives and forks, the anæmic, ugly modern china, the bad overfaceted cut glass—it was all in Mrs. Drake's taste. Only in the food, one of Charlotte's deliciously-cooked boiled dinners, was there any sense of cheer. They talked about many things, Hester in particular. The meal was a brief one, although rather longer than usual, and after it was over Azile joined Southward in assisting Charlotte with the dishes. After dinner, to Mrs. Drake's second batch of

questions, Azile answered that, as far as she knew, Hester had come back from her trip to Washington and was still living in the little apartment. Edith Hale was taking care of her dying aunt, somewhere in the wilds of New Jersey. Ripley Fearing and John Smith were busy as usual in New York. Dwight Cameron had left the city for a little vacation trip to his house in New Hampshire. All this talk ran smoothly and Southward contributed her full complement.

Presently Southward arose. "If you don't mind, Mrs. Morrow," she suggested, "we'll go into your room now. I can give you all that information so much better where we can have a desk or table and you can make notes."

In the southwest chamber, she placed more logs on the fire, drew two winged chairs to the hearth, motioned Azile to one of them, herself took the other.

"I hoped to get here much sooner than this," Azile began without preliminaries. "But I had to stay in New York. We did not dare hire a nurse for Dwight; so we took turns caring for him, Ripley, John, and myself. He's all right now. There was never any real danger, only a shoulder-wound. He rallied wonderfully. But of course to a bunch of amateurs like us, it all looked awfully serious for a while. We moved him into his own rooms after a week. Luckily Hester did not come home during that time, although we had an explanation all framed for her about an accidental shooting. As it is, of course, she knows nothing about the real situation. At the end of two weeks Dwight went to his father. He writes that he's all right now, fit as a fiddle, better than he's ever been." Azile stopped and waited.

"It's very good of you to tell me all this," Southward said still with her studied civility. "I confess that I was relieved to get the first reassuring news. I was perfectly well aware how serious the situation was, I mean in regard to myself, if things had turned out badly. But now that my own safety is assured, I don't mind telling you that I am quite indifferent to the effect on anybody else and particularly Mr. Cameron."

"Yes, I can understand that," Azile admitted. She leaned forward; appeared to examine shoe buckles winking brilliantly in the firelight. "Of course as the situation concerns you and him, it is not my business. As it concerns me, it is. And so I'm going to take the liberty of meddling further in this matter. I shouldn't call it meddling exactly, although you might. However I hope you'll hear me out, for I'd like very much to say what I have to say."

"I'm very interested," Southward announced with a courtesy, still distant and even more polished. "Pray go on. You may believe if you say anything that I find offensive, I shall not hesitate to let you know."

"Please do that," Azile said with gravity. "I prefer it."

Southward's only reply was to assume a listening attitude.

Azile unclasped her hands, leaned back. She fitted one elbow into the arm-crotch of her chair, dropped her chin to her palm.

"Miss Drake, Dwight Cameron is not in love with me. He never has been in love with me. I tried my best to 'infatuate' him because—oh, for several reasons. I won't go into that now, though. But that scene—— What you saw that morning in your apartment was not so much the result of his weakness as of my skill. I planned it all. I took him by surprise. I made him do it. Do you understand?"

"Considering everything," Southward answered briefly, "no."

"Well, you will some time," Azile flashed at her. "I'm afraid I'll have to go into it pretty deeply to make you understand and I must make you understand before I leave this house. You and I, Miss Drake, are both flirts. You know that, don't you? You recognise it to be true of me. Do you admit that it's true of yourself?"

"Yes," Southward answered briefly again.

"That will help somewhat in clearing up the situation. I've been a desperate flirt all my life. I make no bones of it. I can't help it. I was born that way. I have just as much the instinct for personal conquest as a Napoleon for dynastic conquest. And I've made both an art and a science of flirtation. Coquetry and seduction—that's where I live. I've flirted ever since I was twelve. Marriage made no change in my tendencies and inclinations, although I thought it was going to. In fact, I flirted harder the first two years of my marriage than I've ever flirted before or since. The truth of the matter is, it's a stimulant to me. Women who live all over the world the way I have, amidst crowds of people, making new acquaintances all the time and great numbers of them, always resort to stimulants of some kind, smoking or drinking or drugs. I smoke of course, but it's not a necessity with me. None of those other things interest me. My stimulant is men." She paused. Then she added, "You understand what I mean—I'm not suggesting that I'm a sexual pirate."

Southward sat immobile with that admirable stillness into which at any moment of stress she could crystallise her restlessness. But that dark predatory look which always indicated mental

unrest gloomed on her brow, seemed to burst through her smooth skin and lie there, a visible dark stain. . . .

"I hope you understand," she said coolly, "that though I admit I'm a flirt, I don't accuse myself of being the kind of flirt you're describing now."

"Oh, I understand the difference between us," Azile declared lightly. "But I think it's only a difference of kind—not of degree. Sometimes I think I'm the worst of the two and sometimes I think you are. However I'm coming to your case later on. I'll continue with mine. I suppose I should have gone on the stage. I really have a marked ability in that direction. But I'm one of the very few women that you'll meet in a lifetime who have never been stage-struck. If I had become an actress though, it would have taken care of that histrionic impulse in me. For my flirting has become now only a play-acting impulse. I'll tell you my secret. And it's a curious thing that I do tell it. For I have never before told it to any other woman. And I suppose at this moment, I like you less well than any woman I know."

Southward's expression did not change. "I confess to a rather similar feeling as far as you are concerned."

Azile flushed; her composed brightness snapped for an instant. "*Voilà!* that gives me complete liberty. It's reached the point with me now that I'm so bored with everything that I can only interest myself in the new personality which I construct for the man with whom I happen to be flirting. In the beginning, I see what he wants me to be and make myself it. Rather fascinating too—changing into half a dozen women in the course of a year. As far as Dwight is concerned, this is what happened. I had known him for about a year when you met him. Of course he's an outrageous flirt, and he flirted with me. It was all perfectly fair. He knew that I was flirting and I knew that he was. In his case however, I decided to be a literary mentor—it all grew out of one talk in which, according to his engaging custom, he took me into his confidence about the novel he was then writing—asked me to read what he had done—begged for criticism. I had never been a literary inspiration. It interested me. I became one. I worked hard at the job of mentor. Curiously enough that fascinated me with him more than the flirting did and sometime in the midst of it I made up my mind that I'd subjugate him entirely. That was just before he came to Shayneford."

Azile stopped for a moment and ran her hand through her hair.

The movement rumbled its rippled green-gold masses. And apparently subconsciously impelled, she patted them into place again.

"When I came here and found him in a fair way to falling in love with you, I made up my mind that I must break that up. I had had other rivals in the course of my life naturally, and although some of them were much more beautiful or attractive than I, none were so resourceful and so audacious. And I have met some wonderful sirens on the continent. Because of one quality I often won unfairly—my superb physical strength—my greater powers of physical endurance—I mean when it came to such things as walking and mountain-climbing and the like. Now you were an added impetus. Because you were a beauty, much more beautiful than I, with all my physical strength and perhaps more—and equally conscienceless. Oh, I recognised in you a foeman worthy of my steel. I suppose I am admitting that I am a wicked woman when I say that my resolution to conquer Dwight was much strengthened by my perception that Dwight was half in love with you and you with him."

Southward jarred out of her immobility. "We won't discuss that aspect of the situation," she said in a voice dangerously quiet.

"As you will." Azile arose and reached for her cigarette-case. Returning to the fire, she offered Southward a cigarette. Southward refused it with a quick head-shake.

"It piqued me awfully that I could not beat your game," Azile went on, perfectly in command of herself and smiling through the puffs of smoke that came spiralling from her nostrils. "Here you were, a little inexperienced country-girl. You'd had a limited realm as a belle in this little God-forsaken New England hole. Your conquests had been the usual run of country riff-raff that one finds in a place like this. I thought I was going to beat you so easily that the conquest would be a shameful one. And yet, using every weapon in my armory against you, I could not succeed."

She puffed in silence a moment. Southward might have been a bronze statue for any movement she made.

"There's something," Azile went on analytically, "which I recognised from the beginning that you have and I haven't. I can beat you easily enough when it comes to the regular woman-stuff—coquetry, cajolery, seduction—call it what you wish. But you have something that I couldn't get—not in a thousand years. I call it *power*; but really 'power' doesn't describe it. It's more than that. There's something terrifying about it. It's the quality

in you that with all your terrible, irritating natural restlessness, permits you to sit silent and moveless, like some awful overpowering, primitive evil god—as you sit this moment for instance. That's wonderful. That's extraordinary. I'd love it in you if you were a man. But I hate it in you as a woman. Nevertheless I recognise it as strength. I envy you it. But as I said before, there's something terrible about it. It's the thing that drove you to do what you did to Dwight. I couldn't have done that. God! Shall I ever get that picture out of my mind?" Her voice broke, sank an octave, whispered. "When Dwight tottered back onto the couch, dragging me with him—— His blood was on my arm when I pulled myself away."

She stopped short and stared, through the cloud of smoke that hung between them, at Southward. Southward did not move; the smooth blackness of her expression did not quiver.

"Yes, you're made of iron and stone," Azile said as though in comment to herself. "Now I'm going to give you a little peep behind the scenes. I'm going to let you see all the stage-machinery—make-up—everything. When you came to New York, I realised that the positions would be reversed to a considerable degree. In Shayneford I was in your territory. In New York you would be in my bailiwick. In Shayneford, I was at a disadvantage. That night you brought me up to your garret, I saw one of Dwight's cigarette-stubs—his initials were on it—in the ash-tray. I knew that he was seeing you there constantly. And of course I realised, as well as anybody could, what a romantic setting that garret was with its awful, amateur, jumbled picturesqueness. And you, so young, beautiful, and original in this house of the dead. I made up my mind I'd show you a thing or two in New York. I thought I could intimidate you—actually frighten you off. That first visit you paid me and all our first meetings were stage-managed with that end in view. Do you remember for instance, how I forgot to dismiss the taxi and kept it waiting at my door for three hours? I did that deliberately. Do you remember when you sat with me while I dressed, the letters and telegrams and telephone-calls, and flowers that came? I planned all that. Do you remember the clothes I wore during that week-end visit, the succession of *negligées* and evening gowns? I planned to have a whole new, fresh outfit when you arrived. Do you remember the expeditions I took you on—the shopping-trip in which I bought scores of useless and expensive things—the theatre to which I was an act late—the luncheon over which I made such a fuss with the head waiter—the perpetual rout of people at my place—

the dinner at which you and Hester were the only people present who were not celebrities? All that was planned with the idea of dazzling and terrifying you. Most of the things I bought on those shopping expeditions were returned. Some of the people who came to my house were cultivated for the time being just to make me seem a centre of attraction. Many of the celebrities that came to that dinner I scarcely knew. I got one to come with the promise of another, a third with the promise of the other two—and so on. Yes, it was all done to dazzle and terrify you. But you didn't dazzle or terrify one atom. Hester did—but not you."

Azile threw her cigarette-end into the fire, lighted another.

"It was a good piece of work," Southward commented. "I never suspected it at all."

"Because you were so sure of yourself," Azile explained. "I couldn't shake that terrible self-assurance, that fearful horrible something in you that, for want of a better name, I call—power. I suppose the reason I can tell you this now is because I don't care any more. My feeling for Dwight vanished when I saw your bullet strike him down. Of course it couldn't have been a real feeling. I have never had any real feeling for anybody except my mother and perhaps the baby I lost. I did want awfully though to conquer Dwight and to break you. But after all, if I'm not a woman in any womanly sense, I am an artist. I recognise true art when I see it—a masterpiece—genuine feeling. And of course I know, as I think in your heart you know—although you won't admit it—that you're desperately in love with Dwight and he with you."

That predatory darkness in Southward's face became a dangerous blackness.

"You look as though you could murder me now," Azile commented. "*Eh bien!* It makes it easier for me to go on. Now I'm going to tell you what happened after you left New York. I had been having, all during your stay there, a harder and harder time with Dwight. When he spent a whole evening or better a whole day at my place working, he was of course more or less under my influence. But one evening with you—and my instinct always told me when he had been with you—and he became a different person, absent, preoccupied, always on the verge of irritation. I realised perfectly how things were drifting, but I felt powerless. Your trip to Shayneford looked to me as though the gods were playing my game. But one day, while I was out, Dwight came to our place and took all his manuscripts away. I

called him up immediately, but I could get nothing out of him beyond a confused notion that he wanted to be absolutely alone to thrash out a new idea he had in regard to the novel. He didn't want to talk it over with anybody. He told me, when I questioned him, that he was not working in his own rooms, but he would not tell me where. However I met John somewhere and he told me that Hester had gone away. I leaped to the conclusion that she had given Dwight permission to write in your apartment while she was gone. I decided then on a big and final *coup*. I went there one morning. I did not ring the bell, but waited until somebody was going in and followed him upstairs when he opened the door. Dwight looked perfectly thunderstruck at my appearance and I thought not especially pleased. He'd been writing early and late and he seemed tired. Well, the rest of it is one of those scenes that one never describes. I don't know whether you can imagine it or not, for although you're as much of a flirt as I—and I maintain quite as unscrupulous—you are a different type. I provoke infatuation. You compel it. Anyway I'll admit on that occasion I broke every rule of what we call—maidenly—conduct. A man has no chance against a woman in those circumstances. Not if he's flesh and blood, which Dwight assuredly is. I'm going pretty far in my effort to play this game straight when I tell you that Dwight didn't take me into his arms. I threw myself there."

She paused and surveyed Southward with a frank openness. Southward spoke first.

"I shall have to confess," she said politely, "that although most entertaining as character-study, this utterly fails to interest me from any personal point of view."

Azile smiled cynically, threw her cigarette into the fire. "All's well that ends well," she pronounced. "And when I again assure you that Dwight is perfectly well now, my duty—damn the word—I haven't had any active connection with it for years—ends." She arose, stretched, sat down. "I'm going abroad," she announced affably.

For a courteous fifteen minutes or more, Southward took the reins of conversation into her own hands. She talked briefly on general subjects and at great length about any people in Shayneford whom Azile remembered. At Azile's request she described Charlotte's operation. Then she bade her guest a ceremonious good night.

At breakfast the next morning, Mrs. Morrow announced to the family, as she had announced to Southward the night before,

that she must take an early train. Mr. Drake drove her to the station. As soon as she left the house, Southward disappeared with the dogs in the direction of Long Pond. Five hours later she returned, cold, hungry, exhausted, wet to the knees as though she had walked through damp woods.

It was a long time before Long Lanes again saw a visitor from New York.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NOTWITHSTANDING her explicit statements to the janitor, Hester did not leave her apartments, on the day of her long talk with John, until towards evening. After he had gone, she methodically brushed and combed her hair; did it apparently by accident in her old and unbecoming way. Then she carefully prepared herself a luncheon. But after she had spread it on the table, she seemed suddenly to forget about it. She seated herself in a chair by the window, fixed her eyes on the strip of sky above the red-tiled roof——

About dusk, she put on her coat and hat. When, about twenty minutes later, she pressed Josie Caldwell's bell, using the signaling which that lady demanded of her, the door snapped ajar immediately.

Upstairs, the door was open, although Josie was not in sight.

"Glad to see you," called Josie's voice. "Come right on in. At the same old business of making up. How are you?"

"I never did feel better," Hester declared. "New York certainly agrees with me. How are you, Josie?"

"Oh, fair to middling. Sit down—if you're not tired of watching this performance."

Hester took the little chair beside the dresser. She did not speak. Josie was now busying herself with her eyes, a detail of her swift, easy accustomed progress that alone seemed to call for concentrated quiet. She too did not speak for an interval. The silence grew heavy. As though struck by it suddenly, Josie stopped, black pencil in hand, met Hester's eyes in the mirror.

"What is it, Hester?" she demanded.

"Nothing," Hester answered easily. "I'm quiet because it always interests me so to watch you."

She continued to keep silence and she continued to watch. By now, she had seen this process many times but, to-day, it was as though her interest were new and avid. Once she leaned over and, one by one, lifted the little bottles and boxes; studied their labels.

"How did you learn to do it, Josie?" she asked.

"Oh, first, I just experimented, the way everybody does. Then

I picked up points from the other girls. Once I had a friend who was on the stage and I used to watch her. I'm pretty clever at it now. I could make you up swell. Of course I wouldn't use the same things for you as for myself. You being blond, I'd make you as pink and white as possible. Say, how'd you like me to try it?"

"I'd love it," Hester answered. "Now?"

"Sure. Sit right down."

Josie arose and Hester took her place.

First Josie brushed back Hester's hair; wadded the locks that ordinarily hung loose about her forehead into a big weft on the top of her head. Then she covered her face with a toilet cream, massaged it; repeated one by one all the processes which had so entertained Hester. Hester did not once remove her eyes from the mirror. She watched, not breathlessly but with something more tense than breathlessness, the growth of that new Hester in the glass. When Josie finished, there stared back at her a doll-like replica of her own face, very pink in the cheeks but very white elsewhere, except where eyes, normally grey-blue, now a mysterious dark blue, sparkled from caverns of shadow. Nostrils had turned a shell-pink, ear-lobes a deep rose, lips a moist crimson, and all showed the smoothness of a marvellously fine porcelain that has been baked and painted and fired. Josie took down Hester's hair. She did not rebraid it but she recoiled it in a more becoming fashion. She removed the hairpin from the skein of straying wefts; combed these out fluffily; drew them in waves on Hester's forehead; caught them tautly there with invisible hairpins.

"My word, Hester, you look a swell!" she said, standing off and surveying her own work. "All you need is a pair of earrings, long ones—to be a perfect——"

"Josie," Hester met Josie's admiring and amused eyes in the glass. "How do you address them?"

"Oh," Josie answered easily, "'Hello, Kid,' or 'Hello, Blondie,' or 'Anything doing to-night, Kid?'"

"And do they always answer?"

"Not on your tintype! Most of them pay no attention whatever. Some you have to follow up and others just come right along like lambs."

"You don't bring them here?" Hester asked.

"I don't. Violet does. I don't want to take chances with the tenement-house law."

Hester's head dropped. Involuntarily her hands went up to

her eyes. They stopped midway in air as though she were afraid of smudging the doll-face that looked at her from the glass.

"Oh, Josie, Josie!" she exclaimed. "How did it all happen? You know that I believe I haven't any business to ask you that question. And I wouldn't ask you if you hadn't said that you'd tell me sometime. But I love you and I'm sorry. Tell me now."

"Sure I'll tell you. I don't mind telling *you*, Hester. It's a long time now; and I've often thought I'd like you to understand how it happened. I know there used to be a whole mess of talk floating around about me when I lived in Shayneford. But that wasn't true. I was a good girl then. I don't mean to say that I didn't do a lot of things that girls shouldn't, but nobody had any license to knock me in those days. And when I first came to New York I was a good girl. I didn't come here with a man as everybody said in Shayneford. I came alone and I came because I couldn't stand the rotten dulness of that little town. I had too much pep in me to stay. That was my trouble—pep. I got a job in a department-store first."

Josie half rose, made as though to throw off her kimono; apparently thought better of it. She sat down again and gave herself completely to her narrative.

"I met a man—no matter how. He was in a broker's office downtown. He was the most elegant man I had ever known; handsome, good clothes, and a spender; and knew this town from A to Z. I was crazy about him. If I was some girls, I'd say it was a case of seduction, but it wasn't. I was just as willing as he was—and more. And what happened needn't have happened at all; for I was over seven and knew the ropes. But I got the idea that he'd marry me if I put him in a situation where he'd ought to. And he would of. So I laid for him. But just after I got that way, he came down with typhoid. He was recovering from that all right when he got appendicitis. And by God, he died—in three days he died. I'd been putting off doing anything because I knew he'd marry me when he got well. When he died—well, for a week or two I don't know what I did. And then it was too late for me to run any risks. At first I thought I'd go to his folks and put up a holler. They had money and I thought it was up to them to take care of me. But what was the use? They wouldn't of believed me. But the thing that kept me from that was thinking of him. He loved his mother dearly—used to talk a lot about her to me. And I didn't want to make her unhappy. So I didn't let them know anything about it. I just stayed on here in New York and put it through. He'd given

me some jewelry and I had a little money. I hocked the ice. But when I came out of the hospital, there was damn little left. Then there was the kid to support. I thought this was the easiest way out. Maybe there was some other way but I didn't know it then; and I don't know it now. Anyway, I tried it and I took to it like a duck to water. Of course I ain't in this business because I prefer it. Not that I'm going to stand for anybody looking down on me. But I've put by and I'm not always going to stay with it. After a while, I'm going out West to open a boarding-house. Just the same, believe me, I'd rather be what I am than back in that department-store or a biscuit-shooter or a chambermaid. Say," Josie's voice dropped to a note frankly business-like, "if you ever hear in your travels of any good opening for a boarding-house in a Western city, put me next, will you?"

"Yes," Hester promised mechanically, "I will. Where is your child, Josie?"

"I board him with a farmer's wife over on Long Island," Josie answered briefly.

"Does she know?"

"I never told her but I guess she suspects; for she soaks me a little now and then. Not so much as she might though, and that's why I stay with her."

Hester pondered, her chin in her hand, her blackened eyelashes sweeping her pinkened cheek. "Poor Josie!" she said.

"I don't want anybody's pity," Josie snapped.

Hester's lashes swept upwards. "I'd like to see your boy, Josie. Will you take me there sometime?"

"You betchu."

"And, Josie, I'd love to have him come to Shayneford some time to stay with me. In the summer. When I'm settled there again. Would you like that?"

"Sure. He's a nice kiddie, believe me. And the spit of his father, which would make things easy there. Want to wash that make-up off?"

"No. If you'll lend me a veil, I think I'll wear it home. There's a friend coming to call this evening. She's pretty straight-laced and I'm just going to let her walk in on me and find me like this."

Hester put on her hat. Josie fumbled among the things in the top drawer of the chiffonier; brought out a thick black veil. She watched Hester adjust it with eyes suddenly become as hard as pebbles from impassivity.

"Good-bye," Hester said, "I must be going now. You've been awfully good to me, Josie. Oh, I've been so glad to see you again, and I understand it all now. It's so different from what everybody thought. I never shall worry about you again."

"You speak as if you were saying good-bye for good," Josie charged her.

"No," Hester answered. "It does happen though that I'm going off on a little trip, Josie. I've never seen any other city but New York and Boston and I do want to do a little travelling before I go back to Shayneford. However I shall probably see you again when I return to New York. I'll tell you all about it then. Good-bye, Josie." She bent and kissed her.

"Good-bye, Hester," Josie said. She accompanied Hester to the door. But she did not return immediately to her dressing. Instead she stood for a moment in the centre of the room, thinking. Then she made a sudden dash for the window of the front room, pulled up the curtain and the sash; leaned half-way out. She stared frantically first up, then down the street. Hester was not in sight. A taxi three blocks off sped rapidly towards the distance.

But Hester was not in that taxi. Instead she had gone into the drug-store on the corner and made a variety of purchases—all of things that came in little high-coloured boxes and bottles.

The next morning early, she went to a department-store and purchased the longest pair of cheap earrings there, a combination of jet with rhinestones; also she bought a black veil extravagantly figured. Then she stayed the rest of the day indoors.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN Hester lighted the gas that evening, she pulled down the shade of every window in the apartment. In her bedroom, she lighted two gas-jets. She opened the bundle of purchases that she had made the night before; spread out on her dresser all the little boxes and bottles; broke covers, removed stoppers. There was a round box of a caked white powder, a square one of deep pink rouge; a diamond-shaped one of pale pink nail-dust. One bottle held a white liquid which, however frequently shaken, constantly divided into two parts, a thick white sediment below, a thin white liquid above. A jar held a soft fine face cream. There were eyebrow pencils, eyelash brushes, a lip-stick, a rabbit's foot, a powder-pad. There was a bottle of perfumery.

Hester took off the light house-gown which she had been wearing all day. She removed the hairpins from the front of her hair, swabbed the hair back with a brush, pegged it down with side-combs, until all exposed, bare, unmitigated, her face dropped its freckled oval pendent from a plane of gold. She painted over her freckles a fair reproduction of the mask which Josie had put there the day before. She did her hair very carefully in the way Josie had done it, catching many little curving curling wisps down on her forehead with invisible hairpins. Then she drew on the new pale-yellow waist with the butter-coloured lace, the new reseda-green skirt which Ellen Day had made; turned back a little deeper the modest V at the neck. By means of their tiny screws, she hung the jet-and-rhinestone earrings on her ear-lobes. She put on the little reseda-green jacket. She donned the black foliage-trimmed hat that Maud Morpeth had fashioned for her; draped over it, so that it fell on both sides of her face, the heavily-spotted new veil. She drew on long white gloves. Last of all, and this after she had started for the door, turning back hastily as one who forgets something, she poured some perfumery from the untapped bottle into the V at her neck.

Early in April, it was a comparatively soft night. The city had begun to flicker light; to flash colour; to rock with gaiety. It had responded to the peremptory invitation of the spring with what seemed more than its normal crowd. Hester, all the usual

hesitation gone from her gait, walked briskly north and east. She stopped at the Grand Central Station; passed into its brilliant glare.

She went immediately to the huge main room; stood for an instant under the painted azure, star-specked firmament, looking this way and that over the yellow floor with its criss-crossing files of figures; crossed to the side where trains were arriving. There she stood examining keenly the incoming throngs, as one expecting a friend. She did not glance at the women. The men she gave a close scrutiny. Of some that examination was brief; it ended in an instant; of others it was longer. All kinds of men passed: little and insignificant; short and fat; tall and lean; big and imposing; mean, dirty, vacuous, lascivious, scholarly, well-bred, absorbed, frigid. Here a smartly-dressed, clean-shaven, alert-looking typical New Yorker held her gaze with his quick, sure movements. There a middle-aged man, florid, prematurely white, handsome, caught her flickering attention. Again, it was a dashing carriage, a debonnair face, a gay smile, a ringing laugh that pulled her gaze this way and that. Some of the men, glancing in her direction, darted at her a look that grew liquid with invitation. And one, brushing close, muttered something inarticulate under his breath.

Train-load after train-load poured through the gates; deployed over the huge room, disappeared through various exits. Hundreds, thousands added their transient numbers to the population of the night-blooming metropolis. Many of these were obviously suburbanites, come for an evening's entertainment. Others carried suitcases, valises, boxes, bags, bundles, travelling impedimenta, elegant or plebeian, or frankly makeshift; or were assisted by red-capped porters. Hester's scrutiny always grew more close as these pilgrims passed.

Suddenly her eye fell on a man in the midst of such a procession of burdened travellers. He had just come from the country—that was evident. He carried a cheap telescope suitcase. He was a born countryman, that after a longer look was also evident. Big, broad-shouldered, tanned, he wore a long rough shapeless overcoat and a visor-cap. From under the razor-like rim of the cap came curls of a deep brick red, roached in scallops on his forehead. In his shaven neck, however, his hair made a symmetrical arc. His skin would undoubtedly have been that white which goes with red hair if it had not been first burned and then bronzed by the weather. A porter reached for his bag and he said his refusing thanks with the ready smile of one who

is grateful for a courtesy. His teeth were like milk and that smile flashed a soft pleasing ripple of white across the hard, brown surface of his face. His clear, cool, country gaze which had begun, as it penetrated the enormous station, to show a sense of its overpowering bigness and noise, came to Hester, lingered on her for a shy and respectful interval; went again to the huge spaces that confronted him. He passed.

Hester's eyes had riveted on him. Now they followed him. Her figure grew tense. He was disappearing into a crowd. Suddenly she broke into a dash, hurried to his side.

"I've been waiting a long time here for you," she murmured in his ear.

When Hester returned to her apartment the next day, she wrote three letters.

To her mother, she said:

"I'm starting off for a week or ten days' trip to Washington—and if my money holds out I may go on to Baltimore and Richmond. It's a little lonesome here without Southward and as I have always wanted to see those cities, it seems to me that now is a good time to do it. It won't cost you any more because I haven't used all my own money yet. I don't know exactly where I'll be but you'd better send your letters General Delivery, Washington, until I give you further particulars. If anybody should ask my address, don't give it. Say that my movements are so uncertain that you can't tell anything about them. The fact is I don't want to have to write any letters."

To Southward, she wrote substantially the same thing, omitting any address.

To John, she wrote, "I want to be alone where I won't have to talk with anybody and can think things out. So I'm going away for a little while. I'll write when I come back." She omitted the address from this also.

Then she packed her trunk and sent it off.

On the way to the station she ran into Dwight. "Whither away so early in the morning, fair maid?" he inquired blithely. "And why in such glad raiment clad?"

"I'm going off for a little visit," Hester answered, looking him steadily in the eye.

"My word, you certainly look blooming! If it weren't Hester the Daughter of the Puritans, I would say that you had a regular actorine make-up on under that veil. How long are you going to stay?"

"A week perhaps."

"Southward saying anything definite about her return in her letters to you?" Dwight asked, a little stress on the word, *you*.

"No. She said about three weeks when she left—and she hasn't changed her plans yet. I expect I'll be back before she is. I wrote her so last night. I thought this would be a good opportunity while Southward was away to make some little visits that I've got to get done, before I go home. The apartment looked quite sad when I left it."

"Oh, say—I'm glad you spoke of that. Do you mind my using your place to write in while you're gone? I promise to keep it as neat as possible."

"Of course, Dwight," Hester answered readily. "Use it all you want. Here are the two keys—this one's the outer door, this the inner."

"Gee, that'll be great," Dwight said. "I'm not writing at Azile's any more. It was getting to be too much of an imposition—as busy as they are up there. Well, so long, Hester. Hope you have a good time. See you when you get back."

CHAPTER XXX

It was not a week but a month later when Hester returned to her apartment. She found a note from Dwight which dated back a week.

"Thank you for your hospitality, Hester," it said. "I've got along rippingly here and now I'm off to New Hampshire to stay with dad for a while. I find I'm a little seedy. Too much dissipation, I suppose. The people in the office have been very good about giving me a lay-off. Hope to see you soon, if not here, perhaps in Shayneford."

There was also a brief letter from Southward saying that she was not coming back to New York and asking Hester, as soon as she returned from her trip, to pack up the rest of her things and send them to Long Lanes. Hester did not do this immediately. She did not even unpack her own trunk. But from the top tray she took the letters, which had come to her regularly during her absence, from John. She read these three times from beginning to end.

The first letter said among other things, "You were quite right about Edith—only it's more horrible than we guessed. When I came to hunt her up in Raleigh, I found her in a little frame two-story house, no aunt there. There never had been any aunt. The aunt was her excuse to get off alone. However, to begin at the beginning, I had a show-down with Rena, that afternoon. I went straight to her from your place. As you guessed, she had begun to suspect but was not quite certain. She said she had made up her mind to talk it over with you, was coming the next day to your apartment. I took Rena with me and together we faced and accused Edith. At first, she denied it; then broke down and told the whole story. It's ghastly, but that will have to wait; I can't tell it now. I've engaged a house for Edith in Morriston. Such a home, all jigsaw and wooden lace. When you consider Edith's tastes—however, I was in a hurry and it had to do. Rena will stay there with her. It's going to be a long fight, but we've got to win and we're going to win. Just as soon as Edith feels like seeing anybody, of course she'll want to see you. She doesn't know that you know. It didn't occur to her that you

might know, and so we haven't had to lie. It's going to be hell at first, gradually reducing her supplies. Of course she'll hate us both and mistrust everybody. Rena is the very quintessence of love, devotion, and tact. I shall commute every night for a while. I forgot to say that Mrs. Pelham is chaperoning the arrangement. Of course we had to take her into our confidence. She was not so surprised as we expected. She said that her intuition told her that something was wrong with Edith, something more serious than a passing illness. She had never thought of drugs though. I'm coming to see you as soon as I can. Don't forget, Hester, that I love you, love you, love you—love you as I never loved before and will never love again. Our talk the other day was but the beginning of many talks. We've got to work out this situation together until the way lies clear before us. You don't know, you never will know—whatever happens—what happiness my love for you and your love for me means to me and will always mean to me."

The other letters gave bulletins of Edith's condition, most of them far from optimistic. Somewhere in them always came a variant of this plea. "For God's sake, write to me when you can. Let me know where you are and what you're doing and when I can see you. I'm living under a fearful strain, Hester. Don't make it harder."

Strange expressions sped across Hester's face as she read. Sometimes it lighted with a brilliancy that would perhaps have surprised John. Again it dulled to an apathy that even her Shayneford days had never seen.

When she had finished reading the letters the third time, she destroyed them. Then she wrote John. "I'm back in New York, but I'm on the wing. I still don't want to see anybody. I think I've worked everything out. Do you remember how often I've complained to you that I've never broken through into life? I think I've done that at last but I'm not sure. I'll see you when I can and in the meantime I'll write when I'm sure."

That afternoon she ransacked the East Side between Fourteenth and Twenty-third Streets for a boarding-house. Finding one, she gave notice by telephone that she was leaving the apartment. The next morning she moved into her new quarters. She left no address with the janitor.

A week drifted by.

Superficially her days were long purposeless ones. In the morning, she stayed in bed as late as was possible and yet get into the dining-room for breakfast. Until luncheon, she busied

herself in her room, dusting, mending, darning. The afternoons were given to long aimless tramps. From river to river, across on one street, back on another; up the more remote Avenues as far as her strength would bear her; then back by surface-car, or elevated, or subway. Across bridges and into strange new regions which her eyes always examined and of which her absent mind—it was quite evident—took no note. Over the bay in ferries, studying with an appearance of interest that was a mere mask, stretches of river flecked with water-craft. In the evenings, and they were long ones, lasting till midnight, she wrote letters to her mother, full of detailed descriptions of a purely imaginary gaiety, in which John's name constantly recurred; read herself to sleep; or went to bed to lie for hours, staring open-eyed at the ceiling. Yet under all this lassitude and purposelessness, existed something tense, an expectancy that foamed with feverish anxiety as one, two, three, four days went by. Another week and she was an embodied restlessness, torn by conflicting impulses.

In the meantime, spring had come to stay. One by one she had redeemed those promises dropped so carelessly two months ago. The winter sky had melted and dropped to the earth in a hundred spring showers, revealing behind it a summer sky of the tenderest blue. Flowering trees and shrubs had changed from wind-blown gauzes of white or pink to sturdy leafhood. The early spring flowers had come and gone. The grass-plots were speckled with later ones. The rivers ran smooth and blue between their filthy banks. Some singing birds visited Manhattan; and a few stayed.

All the usual signs of an accepted spring on the part of the human plant manifested themselves with equal inevitability. The streets blossomed with new clothes, high-coloured and frailly beautiful. The crowd on the Avenue thickened. Visitors grew more numerous every day. Buyers from the West and South appeared. The air began to fill with the annual feminist ferment. Suffrage flags flashed everywhere. The words VOTES FOR WOMEN in black on yellow backgrounds or against stripes of green and purple and white began to pervade the Manhattan world. Vivid suffrage posters flared from windows. Suffragists—beribboned, berosetted, becockaded, bepinched—held meetings on street corners; sold copies of the yellow *Equal Franchise*; solicited names for the parade; made speeches in halls and vaudeville-houses, between the acts at the drama; invaded cafés, restaurants, foyers of theatres, and lobbies of hotels.

One afternoon Hester started to walk as usual. But although her air of restless waiting and of nervous anxiety stayed with

her, she moved briskly as one who has an object. A little way up an avenue, she turned into a side street. Midway in the block was a house bearing a physician's sign. She rang the bell.

When she came out, the look of waiting and of anxiety, all the restlessness and nervousness, had gone. She was quiet. But she walked no longer with her head down, as one who does not care where she is going; but with her eyes up and boring straight ahead, as one who sees a vision at the end of a long tunnel. Involuntarily she had turned towards Fifth Avenue. And now a bugle-call brought her eyes to the earth. Just ahead, forming a human barrier across the vacant sunlit side street, was a crowd of people. As though welcoming this diversion, Hester threw herself against that barrier, wormed her way through the mass. People pushed her and pulled her; stared at her; commented in audible and unmeasured terms on her relentless persistence. It was quite evident that she heard none of this. She found herself presently in the front row standing beside a policeman. Across the street stretched another massed body of spectators. Music sounded.

A parade was coming up the street.

A company of mounted police headed this parade. Behind the parade came a band playing "The Marseillaise." Behind the band walked alone a tall beautiful young woman in white, carrying a big yellow suffrage flag. Behind her, on a white horse, rode another woman, young also, beautiful and in white, carrying a big American flag. Behind her came many women on horseback. Behind the horsewomen came women on foot. More women and more women and more women, pouring up from Washington Square. Women and women and women, making straight for a goal under the distant shadowy bank of the Park trees. Eight abreast they marched, and in the middle of the street. On both sides of them, planes of asphalt, glassy as mica, stretched utterly bare to the curbs. As far as the eye could see those glassy planes were lined with dense black-and-white, yellow-specked crowds that ran smoothly over sidewalks, up steps; invaded windows; covered roofs—like a heavy human fungus. As far as the eye could see, those glassy planes were separated by the stream of striding women, bearing a thick forest of banners that flaunted every color of the rainbow—like a moving flower-bed. Here and there, first at the right, then at the left, a marshal, white-clad, held the line in order and in step. Here and there, first at the left and then at the right, a policeman on horseback movelessly surveyed the scene. More women and more women and more women, still

pouring up the Avenue from Washington Square. Women and women and women, still marching towards that goal under the shadowy Park trees. All kinds of women. Women of the arts, the professions, the trades, the home. They waved all kinds of flags. They bore all kinds of mottoes. They wore all kinds of clothes. Delegations from foreign countries showed the brilliant colors of peasant costumes. Delegations of college students, in caps and gowns, made black-and-white notes in this futuristic welter. Carriages and motors bore wrinkled, white-haired old ladies, wearing yellow badges, whose childhood had seen the inception of this movement. Mrs. Edgerley carrying a yellow flag, came in a carriage alone—little, still, solemn, her spirit pouring in white fire through her tiny tired face. Young mothers pushed perambulators, wound in yellow, holding babies who would perhaps see the fruition of this movement. Mrs. Fanshawe wheeled the twins, big-eyed, apple-cheeked, and smiling from under little yellow caps. And more women and more women and more women, still pouring up from Washington Square. Women and women and women, still striding towards that goal under the shadowy Park trees. Then came whole families marching together. Then came the men, hundreds strong. Then came the socialists, men and women, hundreds strong. And then more of the striding women. Always by eights. Marching when they could hear the music with grace and precision. Marching when they could not hear it, raggedly and out of step. Old women and young women. Big women and little women. Fat women and thin women. Pretty women and ugly women. Well-dressed women and shabby women. White women and black women. Nondescript women and distinguished women. Self-conscious women and unembarrassed women. Frank, free, fine women. Tired, dull, sodden women. Inspired women. Hopeless women. Gay, gallant women. Dry, flavourless women. More women and more women and more women. Pouring up from Washington Square as though all the women in the world had gathered there. Women and women and women. Striding towards that goal under the shadowy Park trees as though everything that Woman desired awaited them there.

Hester reached the Avenue at three o'clock that Saturday afternoon of early May and she stood there until eight, watching. She did not speak once. But from marchers came so often a variation of the following dialogue that it is strange it did not penetrate even her absorption.

"Did you notice that tall blond girl that we passed on the right? The tears were just *streaming* down her face."

"Yes. But if she's so interested, I wonder she isn't marching."

"Perhaps she'll fall in."

But Hester did not fall in.

There came two more months of waiting in the little boarding-house. A different waiting now. Hester began to busy herself. She sewed in the morning. She took long walks in the afternoon, but her walks were brisk because generally there was an object at the end of them. As was inevitable she became better acquainted with the people in the boarding-house, but she carefully avoided intimacy. She never went to any room but her own, and her fellow-boarders never came to hers. Her mother's letters began to change in tone. All along they had encouraged her to stay. Now they began to suggest that she come home, suggested first; then urged; then commanded. For a long time, Hester's answers pleaded for just a few days more. Finally a letter came which said, "This is the last money I shall send you." Hester did not look surprised when she read it. She smiled a little. And that afternoon she began to pack.

CHAPTER XXXI

She walked in on her mother the next night. Only one lamp was lighted and Mrs. Crowell sat in the glow, knitting. She looked very handsome, very majestic in one of the simple gowns, of almost uniform plainness, which she habitually wore.

"Well," she exclaimed, "decided to come home at last—did you?" Her tone was not ill-natured and she kissed her daughter. "I thought I never was going to see you again. It's the second of July, miss, and you've been gone nine months. I'm glad you're back for the Fourth. Hungry?"

"I had a late luncheon on the New York train, but not time for anything more than a cup of coffee in the South Station. If there's anything to eat——"

They went into the kitchen together. Hester removed only her hat.

"Aren't you going to take your coat off and stay awhile?" her mother rallied her.

"I'm going to stay," Hester said with a brief evanescent smile, "but I won't take my coat off just yet. Somehow the house seems a little cold to me. I've got accustomed to steam heat, you see."

She sat down at the place which her mother spread for her. Mrs. Crowell, talking all the time, brought food from the ice-box; warmed up some of it; made tea. "Lucky the fire hadn't gone down," she said. "You've grown a lot stouter," she added, looking keenly at Hester for an instant. "I must say it's becoming. You always were too thin, Hester."

"Yes, I've gained some," Hester admitted. "What's that? Oh, Tabby." She leaned down and scooped the cat off the floor, held her in her arms, petting her. "You got rid of her last family, didn't you?"

"Yes. I never thought I would though. I gave away the last one yesterday. That's why she's so lonesome. Seems as if everybody in Shayneford now had one of Tabby's kittens. I'm afraid we'll have to drown some of the next litter."

"Poor little Tabby!" Hester mused softly. "To bring so many babies into the world and then never really to enjoy any of them." She smoothed the cat's head delicately between the ears. Tabby responded with purrs of approval.

"Well, you've had a fine time, Hester," her mother said when they came from the faintly-lighted kitchen to the shadowy living-room. She seated herself full in the light of the lamp; resumed her knitting. Hester however chose a shadowy corner. Her mother glanced at her from time to time. Hester was quiet but she was very different from the girl who had last occupied that chair. Her quiet was no longer supineness, indecision, lassitude. It seemed rather the emanation of a big central force. Now when she moved, it was with briskness, precision, determination.

"You're improved," her mother vouchsafed briefly.

"I'm glad you think so, mother," Hester answered. "I feel myself that I've improved. In fact, I'm a different woman, in many ways. I've got so much to tell you that I really don't know where to begin. And in fact, I don't think I will begin now. If you don't mind I'm going to run over to see Southward for a few minutes."

"Why, you've just come home," her mother expostulated.

"I know. But I have special reasons. I've got to give Southward some messages as soon as possible. Somebody is sure to call this evening. Plenty saw me at the station. I feel awfully tired. I don't want to talk to anybody just yet but you. You and Southward. But after I get home, I'll talk all night if you want."

Mrs. Crowell looked dissatisfied. A question arose to her lips, hovered there. She forced it back. "All right," she agreed with an unaccustomed air of uncertainty, "be back as soon as you can."

Hester strode swiftly through the soft summer night, in the direction of Long Lanes. So quick was her gait, so motive-driven and speed-fired that of the three people she passed on the road, two did not recognise her. The third called out, "Is that you, Hester Crowell? My land, I'd never known you, if I hadn't heard you were here. Where you steaming to?"

Hester answered, "Hullo, Libbie. I'm going to Southward's. See you soon, I hope." She went on with unimpeded speed.

At Long Lanes, Mr. Drake opened the door for her, welcomed her in his heartiest manner. Southward was in the garret, he informed her. Hester stayed for a decent interval with Mrs. Drake and Charlotte, answered the volleys of questions from the former, listened with interest to Charlotte's ecstasies in regard to her clearing sight. After a while, however, she took a candle, sped up the stairs to the dimly-lighted garret.

Southward was lying on the *chaise-longue*, reading. As the

light came up through the stair-opening, she raised herself with a surprised expression. "Hail, Lady of Kingdoms!" Hester called.

Southward jumped to her feet. "Good heavens, Hetter! Where did you come from?"

"New York," Hester answered, kissing her.

"Lord, Hetter, I'm glad to see you. You're the one best bet in a land of fakes. When did you get in?"

"The seven train. Surprised mother. I came over here as soon as I could get away."

"I suppose you're home for keeps now."

"No," Hester said. "It's about that that I've come over here. I've come to say good-bye. I'm going away to-morrow. I don't know how long I'm going to stay or when I'll come back—if I ever do come back. And, Southward, here's where you must remember our old compact. I don't want you to ask me where I'm going or why. I can't tell anybody and I don't want to lie to you. Nobody knows—not even mother yet. Things have happened, terrible, beautiful. I can't tell you about them now. But I shall tell you as soon as I can tell anybody. And probably I shall never tell but one other person beside you."

Southward stared. "Let's sit down," she said abruptly. She seated herself on the *chaise-longue* and Hester took the wing-chair. "Of course I'll do anything you ask, Hetter. It all sounds awfully mysterious. But I guess you know what you're doing. And I don't care what it is as long as you're doing something. You've changed, Hetter—even since I saw you. You're much stouter. You're improved. New York did that, didn't it?"

"Something did. You don't look as well as you did when you left New York, Southward. What's the matter?"

"I expect Charlotte's operation dragged me down a little. It was considerable responsibility to take. And there's been some care since. She's getting along splendidly though."

"Yes, I could see that. Oh, I'm so glad."

"This year has brought its changes, hasn't it?" Southward commented sombrely, "changes for all of us. Charlotte—you—me."

"And the strangest of all," Hester said, "is what it's done to me. The restoration of Charlotte's sight seems meagre beside it. I'm a different woman. And my life henceforward will be utterly changed. The old Hester is dead. How queer it all seems! After this evening I shall be gone. And I don't know when I'll see you again."

"I don't think we'll be separated long," Southward prophesied with a sombre optimism. "We have many things in common that will bring us together."

"Perhaps." Hester seemed to agree.

They talked of many things. Once Hester asked, "Is it true what mother says about Lysander and Pearl?" and Southward answered, "Seems to be."

Southward asked careless questions about New York and their friends there. She left none of them out. Hester answered them as fully as she could. Only in regard to Edith's illness was she evasive. She said simply that it looked like a complete nervous breakdown.

"I've thought that she was delicate, from the very beginning," was Southward's unsuspecting comment on this. "I'm awfully sorry. I like Edith—always have."

Hester's information in regard to Dwight was meagre. Southward did not undeceive her as to the real cause of his absence from New York. Of Azile, Hester had little to say—beyond the fact that she had sailed for Europe. Of Morena, she knew nothing.

Their leave-taking was simple and unprotracted.

"Good-bye, Southward," Hester said with dry eyes and a steady voice, "I hope it will be soon."

"Good-bye, Hetter," Southward returned, "the sooner the better."

For a moment, before she kissed Southward and disappeared down the stairs, Hester stared about at the extraordinary jumble of background, yellow, rose, cherry; old mahogany, old glass, books, Chinese coats, unframed pictures, and plaster statuettes. Perhaps this one spot of colour in her grey womanhood showed a new aspect just as she left it. Perhaps she wanted to deepen what memory of it she was carrying into the unknown. Perhaps in the light of later experiences, terrific but more human, it took on a strange appearance of futility. Perhaps merely a sense of sorrow burned in her heart. Whatever it was, her mood found no expression.

"Don't come downstairs with me, please, Southward," she begged, "I'd rather you wouldn't. I want to remember you here."

In another instant she was gone.

"Well," her mother greeted her return. "You were right about the callers. There's been any God's quantity of them since you left. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Tubman and Flora and Sue-Salome. And all as full of questions as they could stick. I don't think anything that's happened in the history of the town could have

made so much talk as you and Southward going to New York and setting up housekeeping there. And then you staying so long. I don't know why it should—except that Southward's the kind of girl that people always gossip about. The scandal about her since she's come back is more than a little. Of course Sarah Wallis isn't making any talk these days. Not about anybody. But the others say that Southward was come up with for the first time in her life, that she tried her best to get Dwight Cameron but that widow—Mrs. Morrow—cut her out. Is that true, Hester?"

Sitting under the lamp still, Mrs. Crowell took up her knitting. Apparently she had had an exciting session. Two pink dashes stained the powdery whiteness of her old skin. Her grey eyes glowed like black live coals.

"As far as I know, there's nothing in it, mother," Hester answered steadily. "It's rather dark here," she said irrelevantly. She arose and lighted the two other lamps. Returning she stood in the centre of the room. "All the time Southward was there, she and Mrs. Morrow were going everywhere together. Dwight took them both about, took one, then the other, or together just as it happened to come. And Southward went about with three or four other men, the way she's always done. I would have told them that talk was all nonsense."

Her mother still addressed herself to her knitting. Hester's fingers unbuttoned her long cloak, drew it off. The tiny crash of the buttons against the chair on which Hester deposited it drew her mother's eyes up again.

"Well, it's about time you took off——" The coal-black blaze in her eyes flashed out. They seemed to freeze to ice. "What's the matter with you?" she asked in a terrible voice.

CHAPTER XXXII

"Who is he? Who is the father? If you know? Or the fathers—if you don't know? Tell me or I'll kill you!"

The calm which Hester had presented to all the violence of the preceding hour did not break now. "I will not tell you, mother. I told you in the beginning that I would not tell you. And I won't. I can't. Only one thing. It is not John Smith. You know I have never lied to you. It is not John Smith. He knows nothing about it. Possibly I can tell you about it some time, but not now."

"Oh, my God!" her mother groaned. "And it was for this that I was sending you all that money week after week! What do you suppose I let you go to New York for? Do you think it was just to give you a change? It wasn't that. You may be sure it wasn't that. I sent you because I thought it was your last chance to get a husband, like other girls. I've been waiting every week to hear that you were engaged. Every letter that came I thought would have that news. My hands used to tremble when I opened them. I hoped it was John Smith. But he was clever enough to see what kind of girl you were. I don't blame him. What man wants to marry a—— And now you've come back here to tell me that you're going to bring somebody's bastard into the world. I might have known this was the way you'd turn out. I might have known."

Her voice had risen to a scream and she beat the table with her fists. Her long sharp nails had sunk so deep in the flesh of her clenched hands that they lay in little pits that were like yellow wax.

Hester did not speak.

"You've always been a disappointment to me from the beginning. My first child and such a homely one. I nearly died of mortification, until Beatrice came. But she was beautiful, everything I thought my child ought to be. Beatrice never disappointed me. She was sweet where you were stupid, beautiful where you were ugly, graceful where you were awkward. Everybody loved her. Nobody liked you. And she married and married well and had a baby that was as beautiful as she was. And then,

when I was the happiest woman in the world, death took her and little Bee. Took her. Took *her*. And left you! What is there in justice when she went and you were permitted to stay. You—you—you—a——”

Mrs. Crowell's harangue trailed off into expletives that perhaps her vocabulary had never recognised before.

Hester remained silent. Her cheeks, as though they reflected the livid patches on her mother's face, had turned a violent purple-pink. Her eyes had gone dark and brilliant at the same time. But there was no sign of weakening in her face, only a tremendous resolution, an intense watchfulness.

“What in the name of God did you do it for?” her mother raged on, her voice rising to ragged heights, dropping to crazy depths. “If you were tempted and fell, why didn't you get out of it, without letting me know anything about it? Are you such a fool as not to know that that's what women do?”

“I didn't want to get out of it, mother.”

“Why, you—you—— Are you so lost to shame that you—— I believe you're glad.”

“I'm sorry to hurt you, mother. This means terrible suffering for you. But I *am* glad.”

“Oh, my God!” her mother groaned again. “Oh, my God, what am I going to do? How far along are you?”

“Three months.”

“My God! My God!” Mrs. Crowell beat her head on the table. “Think of what Shayneford will say. They all hate you and Southward. You've always acted so superior. You know what Southward is. I'll bet she's responsible for this, the little slut!”

“Southward knows nothing about it, mother. And as for Shayneford, they can know nothing about Southward but good, for there is nothing to be known about her but good.”

Mrs. Crowell stared at her daughter as though her agony had sunk for a moment to a level so low as mere exasperation. Then suddenly she pulled herself into a stony inflexibility. “I won't have you in my house. You can stay where you please. But out of here you go. I've never associated with your kind of woman before and I'm not going to do it now. I won't let you keep on here and make me the laughing-stock of this town, bringing some man's illegitimate brat into the world. You won't be as lucky as Pearl or Gert Beebee even. You'll never marry. No man will ever want you. No, out you go!”

“I'm going, mother,” Hester said. “Of course I'm going. I

had no intention of staying here when I came. I go to-morrow on the earliest train. My plans are all made. They were made down to the last detail before I came home. At first I didn't think I'd come home at all. I thought I'd go out West without letting you know where I was, until I got there. I even considered disappearing without *ever* letting you know. But there were objections to all those plans. The last was too cruel. And the first was too difficult. It would be hard to keep up such a deception for years and years. Besides, I've got to change my name. But my real reason was that I didn't think it was quite fair to you not to tell you the whole truth. I really didn't want to come here. It would have been much easier to go away without doing so. But I thought I owed it to you."

Her mother glared. "Am I dreaming?" she demanded fiercely after a while. "Is it true that I'm sitting here and you're sitting there and you're saying those things that I hear you say? You're as calm as though you were going to a picnic. You don't seem to realise what you're doing. Are you crazy? That's it. You're crazy."

"No, I'm not crazy, mother. You know that. And I realise exactly what I'm doing. I've had three months to think this situation over. I admit I'm calm. And I shall continue to be calm. I've wondered as I sat here if I were dreaming too. For all my life, you have had the power to drive me nearly insane, not I, you. And you've exercised that power—ruthlessly. But you can't do that any more, mother. Many a night I've spent hours and hours praying to God to give me the beauty and charm and grace and brilliancy that you wanted so much. Many a day I've spent hours and hours wishing I were dead. For I never could please you, no matter how much I tried. And I tried with my whole heart and soul. But I couldn't please you. And, oh, how I've sorrowed over that—how I've suffered! I shall carry the scars of those agonies to my grave, no matter how long I live or how happy my life may be. But now I don't care. I've something within me that makes me independent of you and of anything that life can bring me. If my baby only lives a day, it will be worth while. So, remember, mother, abuse is useless. You never can hurt me again."

Mrs. Crowell's words blocked each other on her lips. "You—you—ungrateful——" She stumbled to silence.

Hester arose. "I'll pack to-night," she said. "They're coming for me and the two trunks early to-morrow. I shan't see you again because it will only upset you."

"Be sure you'll not see me. I never want to lay eyes on you again as long as I live," Mrs. Crowell averred. "Never as long as I live." She repeated her phrase with a tragic solemnity.

"I think you never will see me again," Hester assured her. "Good-bye."

Mrs. Crowell turned away, but she did not speak.

"Good-bye, mother."

Her mother neither moved nor spoke.

Hester hesitated an instant, and it was the only hesitation that had marked her conduct since her return. Then she went upstairs.

She dragged two big trunks down from the garret and proceeded systematically with the business of packing. Most of her belongings were in her own chamber but she made a dozen journeys downstairs, returning with her arms full. Only one other sound manifested itself in the house, heavy footsteps pacing back and forth in Mrs. Crowell's room. It was long after midnight when Hester had finished. Then before undressing, she wrote two letters.

One was to Hallowell, "You'll be surprised, dear Matthew, to hear that I have at last exploded. When and where and how and why I can't tell you. Perhaps I can some time. I hope so. I thank you for all your kindnesses to me."

The second was to John, "I've broken through into life," it began without salutation of any sort. "I've found the way. And though I'm terribly unhappy, I'm terribly happy too. Perhaps I'll let you know about it soon. I will if I can. All my love to Edith. And for the present, good-bye."

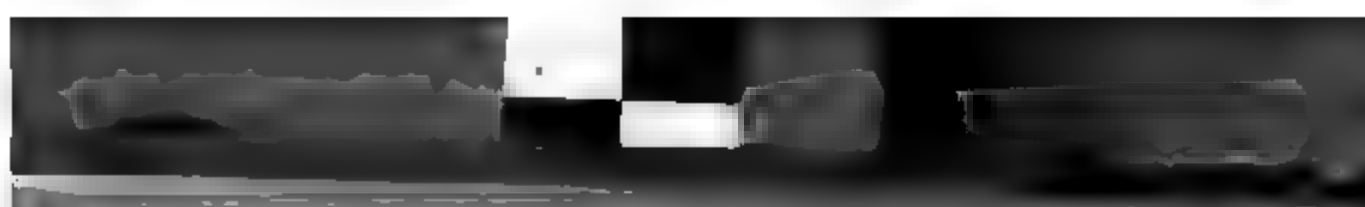
After this she went to bed; slept deeply until her alarm clock awoke her at six. Then she arose, bathed, dressed; drew on her hat and veil, her long loose travelling cloak. With her hand on the door, she stood an instant and surveyed her denuded room, smiled a little, then closed the door. She proceeded through the narrow upper hall on tiptoe, came to the head of the front stairs.

There she paused.

Below on the lower step, black-clad, small black travelling satchel in one hand, Tabby's head protruding from a bag in the other, sat her mother. She arose as Hester started down the stairs.

"I hear the barge coming up the road now," she said. "I've been sitting here for an hour. I was afraid it would be late."

BOOK FOUR



BOOK FOUR

CHAPTER I

SOUTHWARD fell into a kind of lethargy after Hester's departure. For hours she lay in the hammock reading, or worked in the garden, or, in rare fitful bursts of energy, dashed with the dogs on one of her long walks.

"What's the matter with you, Southward?" her grandmother said more than once, "you don't seem to have any gumption. You don't act like yourself."

"I guess I went about too much last winter in New York," was Southward's unvarying explanation. "I don't feel much like doing anything but getting out in the air."

"Why don't you go over to Oldtown? I hate to have you go, but I think the change would do you good. You always have such a nice time over there."

"No, I don't want to go anywhere," was Southward's surprising answer, "Shayneford looks pretty good to me. I'm going to stay right here."

As the summer came on and she worked more and more assiduously in the garden, her annual coat of tan manifested itself. It gave her a meretricious effect of blooming health. But the rose colour beneath was not so high as formerly. She was thinner than usual and she continued not to gain flesh. That thinness seemed to exaggerate the boyish quality in her face and figure. And it proved, what any sculptor would at any time have seen, that the bony structure of her body was admirably proportioned and beautifully shaped.

Charlotte, who had progressed steadily until her vision was as nearly normal as it ever would be, interested Southward now of course as she had never interested her before. She listened with the greatest sympathy to Charlotte's vague and inarticulate expressions of the most concrete and vivid impressions; the difference between the way people really looked and her own preconceived blind notions of them; her enjoyment of green fields, bright flowers, sunset, and moonlight; the results of her long, minute examination of Long Lanes and of various Shayneford

households. Southward had always been the bright particular star of Charlotte's dayless existence; now she was the sun of her new world. She attached herself to Southward with the same fidelity that the dogs showed. She followed her about; waited on her; tried to anticipate her wishes. Often in an unconscious exercise of her regained power, she stared dumbly for long periods into Southward's face, as though trying to find there the answer to an unformulated question.

For the most part though, Southward kept to the house. She had no real intimacies in Shayneford and, now that Hester was gone, she lived in the midst of a self-imposed outcastdom. She went for regular intervals to borrow books of Matthew Hallowell. Occasionally she called on Gert Beebee.

Gert was very happy. Welch was proud of his wife and prouder still of his son. And indeed he might well be proud of that young person.

"My goodness, Gert," Southward had said on her first return from New York, "I never saw such a gigantic baby in my life. What do you feed him on—roast beef?"

"That's what Buster says," Gert asserted proudly. "He says he's going to be a champion heavyweight. I want you to come over here, Southward, the next time Buster gets back. I've told him a lot about you. He wants to meet you."

Southward promised to do this readily enough; and in the meantime she surveyed with a great deal of interest the improvements which Buster Welch's prosperity had effected. In the biggest chamber, a huge brass bed had relegated to the attic Gert's little old painted wooden one. A big modern dresser, its broad top covered with glass, took the place of the beautiful inlaid Sheraton piece which Mrs. Boardman had wiled away from her. This was covered with a toilet-set, in a highly embossed and elaborately monogrammed silver. The parlour showed a big rug; new, shiny, and massive mahogany furniture; a tall lamp which stood on the floor; one huge India-ink portrait with an ornate gold frame of Buster Welch in ring costume; and several photographs, flashed at the ringside by newspaper photographers—one of the knock-out that gave him the championship and the others presenting Welch as he shook hands with various antagonists. In the corner cabinet was a display of worn and stained boxing-gloves. Evidently Mr. Welch overrated his size, for in every room was at least one chair built to accommodate a heavyweight. The piazza displayed two hammocks, held up by iron chains, which would have sustained the weight of a giant.

"Well, you certainly are prosperous-looking, Gert," Southward commented with a faint hint of her old-time glimmer.

"Oh, yes," Gert agreed promptly. "I didn't know there was as much money in the world as Buster makes. We're salting most of it down though. We want the baby to have a college education. And Buster says he'd like to have a fruit orchard in California."

"Hope he gets it," Southward said. "How did the old cats take it, Gert, when you and Mr. Welch got married?"

"Oh, land, you ought to have been here. It was as good as a circus. This town was like a hornet's nest. The things they said! Well, what they didn't suspect they made up. Of course they'd thought everybody was the father of that child but Buster. Sarah Wallis—of course she was the worst—you know what she's like. She beat it right up here as soon as she could get away from her housework and asked me a million questions. But I made short work of her. I guess she was sorry though; for, three weeks later, up she comes with a half-dozen towels that she'd embroidered with my initials—handsome they were too. You know what beautiful work she does. I keep them for best. I'll show them to you. They're upstairs in the high-boy."

"Don't sell that old high-boy, Gert," Southward warned her. "It's a good one and now you've got a son, you want to save all your family pieces to hand down to him."

"You bet I won't sell it," Gert vowed. "I'm sorry I sold that Mrs. Boardman my bureau. I didn't have to either, and I don't know how she got round me. Yes, I do too. She told me a lot of things I could get for Junior with the money and she even offered to buy them for me in New York and send them on. Of course like a fool, I fell for that. I wish I had it back now."

"I saw it in Mrs. Boardman's shop," Southward said. "It made a stunning piece, all polished up."

In the course of the summer Southward met Buster Welch. He proved to be all that the sporting-page predicted of him, a big husky hulk of muscular flesh. His humorous remarks on his own professional experiences were a regularly accepted feature of sporting news. And after talking with him, Southward announced to her family that she believed he really had said most of them. He was a combination, apparently, of his Yankee mother's dry wit and his Irish father's unctuous humour. It was perfectly obvious that he liked Southward, whom he treated with a vast and profound respect. Southward displayed the interest in him that with her always came to the surface for definite character and concrete experience. They discussed his professional encounters with an

acumen which Gert did not pretend to entertain. This was a high light in Southward's strange summer.

The announcement of Pearl Manning's sudden marriage to Lysander had made a sensation in Shayneford which entirely blanketed the echoes of the gossip about Gert. Everybody asked why the secrecy and why the haste. The reason soon became apparent and the village talk, which spared nobody, spared at this juncture neither Pearl nor her mother. Pearl kept much to herself. But Mrs. Wallis made no change in her village activities. There were black circles under her eyes but she held her head as high as ever. If those who in the past had suffered by her malicious talk were inclined to triumph and exult, they did it secretly. When she appeared in village society, it was, however, to plunge into a little interval of significant silence. The instant Sue-Salome brought the official news of the marriage to Long Lanes, Southward ordered a wedding-present from Boston; knives, forks, spoons. She sent them by her grandfather to Pearl and the next day she went to call.

It was late in the afternoon, a soft spring day. The Manning house was a semi-modern one on the outskirts of the town. Parts of its old-time structure had been refurbished by the addition of a pair of modern bay-windows and a wide piazza. As Southward came down the road, two figures, one that had been lying in the hammock, the other sitting in a chair beside it, arose and vanished in the house. When Southward rang the bell beside the modern brown-grained, painted door which held a big rectangular plate of frosted glass, one of those figures opened the door. It was Pearl.

Pearl wore a long loose robe of pink canton flannel, trimmed at the neck and sleeves with lace. The high, patchy pink colour which ordinarily characterised her had disappeared. She looked leaden. The circles under her eyes were more like bruises than shadows.

"How do you do, Pearl?" Southward greeted her briskly. "I was going by so I thought I'd step in."

"It's very kind of you," Pearl answered civilly. "Come in."

She led the way into the front room, a little crowded with what was apparently a combination of the old things Lysander had inherited from his mother and the new things he had bought for his wife. The old furniture was ugly, puffy, but comfortable; the new shiny, glaring, and futile. "I was just going to write you a note, thanking you for the silver. It is very handsome indeed. It was kind of you to send it." She went to the door and called, "Mother! Mother! It's Southward."

Mrs. Wallis glided smoothly into the room. "How do you do, Southward? How's everybody up at your house? Charlotte doing as well as usual?"

"Yes, everybody's all right up there," Southward answered. "And Charlotte is doing wonderfully."

"It was awful kind of you, Southward, to do what you did for Charlotte," Mrs. Wallis said, a faint tinge of warmth in her lack-lustre tone. "I don't suppose anybody but you would have had the courage to try it. But just see how fortunate it's turned out. Charlotte's life has been made over, as you might say."

"It did take some courage," Southward replied. "More than at the time I would admit to myself. Of course I don't think of that now, when it's come out so well. But anybody would have done what I did."

"I was just telling Southward, mother," Pearl struck in, "how pleased Ly and I were with the silver."

"Yes, it is very handsome," Mrs. Wallis agreed. "And heavy! The prettiest pattern I ever saw. I suppose you'll be getting married yourself one of these days, Southward."

"Doesn't look much like it now," Southward confessed with lightness, "does it? No, I'll be the village old maid, I expect."

Southward stayed a civil half-hour, but it was an embarrassing session. Conversation languished at intervals and then broke into little spurts of laboured activity in which everybody talked at once.

When she left, Pearl said, "I'm not making any calls these days, Southward, but I'm coming to see you as soon as I can."

Southward responded that she hoped she would. But Pearl did not come to call. Lysander had vanished as completely from Southward's horoscope as though he had left town. The only news Southward received was what Charlotte or the Hatch sisters brought her. Southward grew more and more into the habit of confining her pedestrian activities to the woody neighbourhood and to the lonely roads about Long Lanes.

June melted insensibly into July. The regular powdering of summer people had begun to make a white fluffiness in the Shayneford streets. Hester appeared for her brief visit and vanished into the unknown. July lapsed into August. The town began to sizzle with mid-summer activity. Picnics in the woods, picnics on the beach, walking parties, strawberry festivals, hay-rack rides, clambakes, concerts, bazaars, excursions to neighbouring towns—Southward entered into none of them. One day grew more like the next as the weeks went by until, finally, her life fell into a system: the same early hour for rising, the same morning hours for

work in her garden and the swim afterwards, the same afternoon hours for walking with the dogs; the same evening hours for reading; the same late hour for going to bed. Nowadays she slept permanently downstairs in a room of the main house. She had not been to the garret since the night Hester said good-bye to her there.

And then suddenly into this dull calm broke tragedy.

CHAPTER II

EARLY one morning, Southward was awakened by her grandfather's voice.

"Southward! Southward!" he called in high cracked tones that had a note, strangely querulous, of terror. "There's something the matter with your grandmother. I can't wake her up."

Southward leaped out of bed and in her nightgown ran through the hall, through the dining-room, into Mrs. Drake's chamber.

Her grandmother lay propped high among the pillows as usual. But her head had turned to one side; it drooped. Her eyelids were down, but only a little. She seemed to contemplate with a fixed insistent inquisitiveness, that had a touch of something sinister, a point where wall met floor. She was the colour of marble—face, neck, arms, and long-nailed hands that lay on the spread—all except the set immovable irises of her grey eyes and the huge masses of her yellow hair. That hair, indeed, pulling out from the braids in which it ended, into long tangles about the brow, gave her a curious effect of maidenhood.

"Grandmother! Grandmother!" Southward called. "Oh, speak to me! What is it? Oh, speak to me, grandmother!"

She drew apart the edges of the short shabby kimono which at night Mrs. Drake wore over her nightgown, put her ear over her heart. When she raised her face, it had a stricken look.

"Call Dr. Simpson on the telephone, grandfather. Quick! Quick! Charlotte! Charlotte!"

Charlotte appeared witch-like in a plain cotton nightgown which came, without trimming, close up to her scrawny throat and close down on her flat wrists, her long heavy hair, black, broken by great dashes of grey, hanging to her waist.

"Fill the hot-water bottle, Charlotte! I'll get the whiskey."

Mr. Drake hobbled to the telephone. Charlotte sprang to the stove. Southward rushed to the sideboard. But on her way back, Southward seized a hand-glass from the bureau. She placed it at Mrs. Drake's lips. The surface of the mirror remained undimmed.

Before the doctor arrived they had banked hot-water bags and bottles about the marble figure; they had managed to pour whiskey between the set teeth. But all three worked with an appearance of growing despair rather than of hope.

Dr. Simpson drew a stethoscope from his bag. Southward, without direction, opened the kimono. Dr. Simpson, first lifting the half-opened eyelids, applied the receiver. He listened a full half-minute, during which the only external sounds to distract his intent listening for that little significant sound within were the intense breathing of Southward and her grandfather, and a suppressed sob from Charlotte. He straightened up finally, faced Nathaniel Drake, seemed to hesitate, and then shook his head.

"She's been dead three or four hours, Nat. It's too bad it came like this. But I told you, you must be prepared for it any time. She didn't suffer a particle—went off between two breaths."

Charlotte burst into hysterical weeping. It was evident that Mr. Drake had to make an effort not to join her. Southward alone maintained complete command of herself. She grew white though, and she kept both that pallor and that command during the long, weary, dreary two days which preceded the funeral. Mr. Drake proved in this emergency as helpless as most men in the face of birth or death. Southward had to take complete charge of the situation. Most of the neighbours offered help; among them Mrs. Wallis, who came immediately. But she turned them all politely away, except Sue-Salome and Libbie, who insisted on taking turns in sitting up with the body.

The funeral was held at home, and for that purpose Southward opened the big lower rooms in the main house. She and Charlotte smothered the coffin in the flowers which the neighbours sent and the prodigal blooms from her own garden. There was no sign of the sinister black box, except as it managed to maintain its shape through this welter of blossoms. Perhaps the news got about that Long Lanes was for the first time in many years to be opened. And possibly to some degree curiosity actuated a proportion of the attendance. At any rate, the lower rooms, the hall, stairs, and doorway were filled with people, some of whom were summer guests. Long Lanes presented a strange spectacle that day, a curious contrast to its normal air, solitary and poignant, of a beautiful high-bred decay. Both lanes leading to the house were filled with motors and carriages. And the constant arrival of groups of people, soberly clad, seemed to add an extra gorgeousness to Southward's garden, blazing with every mad colour at one side, and an extra gloom to the old orchard, submerged in a perpetual chrysophrase twilight, on the other.

After the funeral, life closed over this gap in the family life; it flowed on with the same unimpeded sluggishness. Charlotte mourned so deeply that for a week or two Southward set herself

entirely to the business of consoling and entertaining her. But as her efforts bore fruit in Charlotte's improved spirits, she herself seemed to fall into a lassitude deeper than before. Mr. Drake, on the other hand, became with every day more and more restless. All his old-time pottering diversions in barn and house, over livestock and vegetable garden, decaying orchard and encroaching forest, seemed of no avail now. He wandered dismally from room to room looking out on the prospect as though it were at the same time quite new and unutterably dull.

"Land, how I miss Lorenza!" he said. "Who'd have thought a woman bedridden like that would have made such a hole when she left?"

And, indeed, as Southward observed many times to sympathising callers, they had never quite realised how definite and necessary a part of their family happiness was Mrs. Drake's uncomplaining patience, her cheerful interest in everybody.

One night after his wife had been dead about a month, Mr. Drake came into Southward's room just as she was getting ready to go to bed.

"Southward," he said, "I think I'll go away for a while. I miss Lora so I ain't no good to myself nor nobody. I haven't got any sprawl left and no appetite at all. I feel fidgety all the time. And I guess the ticket for me is to go off somewhere on a voyage. I've always said I'd like to go into the Circle again. I think I'll go out to Frisco for a look-see up Alaska way. And perhaps I'll get a chance there. You wouldn't mind being left here alone with Charlotte, would you, if I got Mannie Higgins to come up and look after the animals? I'll leave enough money in the bank for you to live on while I'm gone."

"No, Cap'n," Southward said. "I wouldn't mind it at all. I think it will do you a lot of good to get off somewhere for a while. I don't blame you at all for wanting to go into the Circle, and if you had only made it the wilds of Africa, I'd go with you. But I've made a vow never to live in a colder place than Shayneford. Charlotte and I will get along all right. Only you must remember one thing. Put a card in among your papers saying that if you fall ill anywhere, I'm to be sent for at once. You promise me that?"

"Yes, I promise." Mr. Drake was obviously relieved that his plans were receiving so little opposition.

His spirits continued to rise during his ten days of preparation; and when he left he was in a real fever of impatience and anticipation.

"Lord, you'd think this was my first voyage," he growled again and again in gruff deprecation of his own impatience.

After he had gone, Southward seemed more quiet than before. But one day she came down to breakfast with something new in her aspect.

"Say, Charlotte," she said, "there's one thing I've been thinking for a long time I'd like to do. It will be hard work but I can do it if you'll help me. I'd like to fix this house up the way it used to be before grandfather married grandmother. I mean—bring down all the stuff that's in the garret and the upstairs rooms and put grandmother's stuff up there in its place. Of course I loved grandmother. But I hate all that truck that she was so fond of. When I was in New York, I got a lot of points from an old Frenchman Mrs. Boardman hired, about putting antique furniture into condition. I'd love to tackle some of our old pieces, and see what I could do with them. I couldn't do it alone in six months. But with your help, it wouldn't take many weeks. And then we'll move into the main house and live there. We'll fix the ell up into a summer kitchen and breakfast-room—the way the Drakes always had it."

"I'd love to do it," Charlotte declared, "just love it. Oh, to think I've got my eyesight back and can see Long Lanes looking the way it used to be! Why, all my life I've heard my mother tell how beautiful it was."

"I'll have to have more help at first," Southward explained. "It will take two men at least to lug the stuff down from the garret and to carry the things in the ell up there. I think we'd better ask Sue-Salome to come and stay a week with us. There are all kinds of little odd jobs she can do."

Once she had started, Southward displayed an activity almost as intense as her former lassitude. She carried her plan through with her customary efficiency and almost her usual speed. One day they lived through household revolution, furniture coming downstairs, furniture going upstairs. All the monstrosities of Mrs. Drake's taste disappeared in the garret; the cheap modern oak, the haircloth and black walnut, the painted knick-knacks, the faded tidies, picture-drapes, chair-throws, lambrequins; the bric-à-brac of gilt, ribbon, and plush; the high-coloured chromo pictures, the hueless modern china, the featureless cut glass. Often at night Southward amused herself making plans of the rooms of the main house, choosing the spots where the beautiful Lares and Penates banished for so many years should finally be placed.

After all, not so many pieces of their old mahogany,

walnut, and maple needed to be done over. For, previous to the advent of the second Mrs. Drake, the family had held its colonial treasures in high esteem; had treated them with a proper deference. But Southward used any blemish—one spot, a single ring made by a wet glass carelessly placed—as an excuse for rehabilitation. She worked all day, worked with an unending energy and a resistless persistence, worked with a patience and perseverance that she had never before brought to anything practical. She discovered that Libbie Hatch had a fair knack for upholstery and she sent to Boston for samples of chintz.

“Most of the old upholstery is too faded and dirty to be pretty,” she explained to Charlotte. “We’ll have every room done in a different pattern.”

Charlotte enjoyed this more than Southward, with whom it was palpably only one method of marking time. Perhaps much of her excitement came from the exercise of her restored vision on all these things, especially the chintzes. “I think I’ll take the pink for my room, Southward,” she announced, “as long as you don’t want it yourself. How I shall admire to wake up in the morning and look at those beautiful roses!”

“I wish Hester were here!” Southward said again and again. “Often we used to plan together how we would fix Long Lanes if we ever got a chance. I’d like Hester’s advice too. She has always had so much more sense of the artistic than I have.”

The work proceeded apace. Gradually the big main house took on its old look. The old floors, freshly waxed, showed in the lower rooms the complication of elaborate marquetry, elsewhere the simplicity of plain hard wood or painted floors. The old pieces, scraped, waxed, their inlay revived, their brasses polished, showed to the best advantage against high wide wall spaces. Old candlesticks reappeared from unused closets; old crystal lamps, old astral lamps. Samplers, silhouettes, engravings, paintings gained a new authority from cleanliness and advantageous positions among contemporary furnishings. And over everything—in jades, crystals, teak, carved ivory, sandal-wood, strange prints, faded embroideries—ran the trail of the Orient. The dining-room, with the noble old sideboard brought down from the garret, displaying rare Lowestoft, the corner cabinets filled with old glass, china, and pewter, the big central-table and the dozen Hepplewhite chairs collected from all over the house, seemed to hold the very essence of a chaste old-time elegance.

The fresh modern chintzes gave the rooms the accent they needed. And re-enforcing them, from every table, wide, low bowls

or tall slim vases of flowers made spots of dazzling colour. At night the soft lustre of the lamps and the softer lustre of the candlesticks merged shining old wood, faded old paper, crisp modern chintz, and brilliant garden-bloom into a perfected whole. The stark old family portraits gazed down on a Long Lanes that they had not seen for a generation.

As quietly as July had come and gone, August came and went. One night, Southward was waked long after midnight by a frantic pounding on the front door. She rushed to her window.

"Who is it?" she called.

"It's Lysander," Lysander's voice answered. "Will you come over to the house, Southward? Pearl's sick and her mother feels that she may need help. Something's happened to the telephone and I've got to get the doctor. I may find him out on a call and I don't want to leave the two women too long alone there."

"All right, Ly. I'll jump on my wheel and be there in five minutes. You go right on."

She heard the sounds of Lysander's buggy wheels retreating as she flew about. She stopped only to put on a skirt and sweater over her nightgown, to throw on a long coat. She did not wake Charlotte, whose deep breathing persisted through all this disturbance. She jumped onto her bicycle, found one of the ruts in the lane, and sped through a glory of checkered light and shade which the old moon produced in conjunction with the trees. Every room in the Manning place was ablaze. She knocked at the door; and finding that the latch gave to her touch, opened it and ran swiftly upstairs. Pearl was sitting up in bed. All her high colour, unnaturally increased by child-birth strain, had come back, flooding her face with bloom. Her two dark braids ran down, one on either side of her face. Wisps of hair lay plastered against her damp forehead. Mrs. Wallis, a long dark kimono over her nightgown, her hair screwed into a little round tight knot on the top of her head, turned a white face towards the door.

"The baby's here, Southward," she remarked evenly. "I'm glad you came. I need a little help."

"Do you know what to do, mother?" Pearl asked in a voice, equally composed. "You must save my baby."

"I know just what to do, dearie," Mrs. Wallis said tenderly. "I'll save her. Come right here, Southward."

Southward threw off her coat; hurried over to the bed.

Mrs. Wallis gave detailed directions. Her voice was low. Her glance re-enforced the quiet command of her words. South-

ward obeyed that command without a word. Pearl with a strange impersonal air intently watched the proceedings.

After a while, Mrs. Wallis wrapped the baby in a blanket and put it on the bed. "Now, lie down, dearie," she ordered, easing her daughter's slow incline with what seemed a gigantic strength and a monumental gentleness.

"My baby?" Pearl questioned.

"The baby's all right, dear," Mrs. Wallis reassured her. Pearl closed her eyes. Nobody spoke. A silent interval they stayed, Pearl flat on the bed, Mrs. Wallis standing beside her, Southward at the footboard.

"There comes the doctor now," Mrs. Wallis said. Apparently no sound broke the still air and yet insensibly the buzz of a distant motor manifested itself, grew into a roar. It stopped and there came up the walk across the piazza and over the stairs quick footsteps. Dr. Simpson and Lysander entered.

"I'm glad you've come, doctor." Mrs. Wallis marvellously smiled. The doctor leaned over Pearl. "She's all right," he said. "Perfectly normal. Doesn't need me at all." He took up the blanketed bundle on the bed, performed some mysterious offices. "I couldn't have done any better myself, ladies," he acknowledged. He seized the little creature by its two feet, swung it through the air, and suddenly administered a swift brisk spank. His victim responded with a wail of indignant protest.

"It's alive," Southward exclaimed in amazement.

"Very much so," the doctor said. "Now, Southward, you take the baby and give it a bath." He handed the blanketed parcel over to Southward. "I'll want Mrs. Wallis here for a few minutes."

"There's a kittle full of water on the stove, Southward," Mrs. Wallis informed her briefly. "Don't get the water too hot."

Southward pulled the blanket closer about the baby. As she left the room, Lysander was still bending over his wife. Apparently he had not noticed that Southward was there.

Southward found a big china bowl; poured hot water into it; tested the temperature carefully; washed the baby. It cried dispiritedly at first. Then apparently it began to accommodate itself to an extraordinary world. Southward dried it carefully, wrapped it again in the soft old blanket. She held it in her arms; its face against hers, listening to its soft peeps of comfort and its faint grunts of disapproval. Once she looked closely into its

vague eyes. When Mrs. Wallis came onto the scene half an hour later, the baby was sleeping and Southward, rocking it softly, was almost sleeping herself. Mrs. Wallis took the child from her; performed some further ablutions; deposited it in the cradle. She worked quietly and sure-handedly; yet when she sat down the tears were pouring down her cheeks.

"Southward, you don't know what I've been through," she said, gasping out her words. "I told Pearl I knew what to do, but I wasn't sure. I've had children of my own but I never saw one born. I knew something had to be done quick but I just guessed. I had to take a chance and I took it. But if anything had happened to Pearl or the baby——" She strangled with sobs.

Southward tried to calm her. Lysander appeared. He came over to his mother-in-law's side, patted her shoulder. His own eyes were red. He did not seem to see Southward. "She's all right, mother. The doctor says she's in fine shape. She's sleeping now and there's no reason why everything shouldn't be plain sailing."

Mrs. Wallis took Lysander's hand and clung to it. But she controlled herself in another minute. "Don't you want to see your little daughter, Lysander?"

"Sure. Is it a girl?"

Mrs. Wallis lifted the little bundle from the cradle, handed it to him. She pulled the folds away from the tiny crumpled purple face. Lysander stared hard at his offspring.

"She's a fine little girl, isn't she?" he commented. Then apparently his mental vision went elsewhere. "It's all right for Pearl to sleep like this, isn't it, mother?"

"Oh, of course," Mrs. Wallis answered. "The more sleep the better of course. We can't be too grateful to Southward, Ly. I don't know what we should have done without her here."

Lysander seemed for the first time to take cognisance of Southward's presence. "Yes, it was mighty good of you, Southward. I don't know how we can ever thank you enough."

"That's all right, Ly," Southward answered. "I really did very little. But you know how glad I am to do that. Lucky I was home when you came."

She arose and drew on the coat which Mrs. Wallis had brought from downstairs. "I guess I'll go now. I'll be back again tomorrow—I mean to-day—to see how Pearl is."

She rode home through a dew-damp, opalescent dawn. She went immediately to bed; but when Charlotte began to stir in the kitchen, she joined her at once. Charlotte listened breathlessly

to the recital of her experience; broke into a flood of questions. "Just think, now I'm going to have a chance to see a little newborn baby," was her last comment.

Late that afternoon, Southward called at the Manning house. Pearl was doing well, Mrs. Wallis informed her, sleeping most of the time, asleep at that moment. She asked Southward to sit down for a cup of tea and all the time they sat talking she held the baby. Later she went up to reconnoitre at Pearl's door. She handed the baby over to Southward and Southward held it for the rest of her stay.

Southward went daily thereafter to call on Pearl. After a few days Mrs. Wallis, leaving the baby with Southward, took that opportunity to go on errands or to do odd tasks about the house. In her absence Southward talked with Pearl; or held the child.

Pearl's case was a normal one and she grew stronger steadily. The baby was normal too. It slept and nursed at regular intervals and with avidity. The birth-strain flush had long ago faded out of Pearl's face; she looked bleak. The baby whitened more gradually; but she soon began to show signs of that beauty which women see in infancy long before it really manifests itself. "She's got such a nice little nose and her ears are as close to her head as though they were buttoned down," Mrs. Wallis said. "I declare I think the baby knows you," she added later. "She seems to have sensed it that you come every day about this hour. I'll have to tell Pearl if she doesn't get well pretty quick, and begin to take care of her, you'll steal her baby's love."

Southward made no answer; but she looked with an amused interest into the tiny face.

One day when Southward came, she found Pearl sitting up. In a few days she was on her feet. In a week or two she seemed her old self, her energy touched only now and then with languor. Southward continued her daily calls. And always the instant she got there, one of the two women deposited the baby on her lap.

October passed and November. Southward's languor began to break into something like her old-time restlessness. Only a little like it though; for she seemed to be actuated not so much by a resistless energy breaking into movement and splashing over in noise, as by a very demon of discontent. In the midst of her late reading now, her eye often wandered off the page and fixed on the distance. Her walks were devil-driven feats of speed. She worked with Charlotte on what remained of the furniture,

in a concentration attended by long moody periods of silence and sudden spasmodic bursts of talk.

"Do you know, Charlotte," she said one afternoon, "I think I may run over to New York for a few days next week. I feel somehow as though I needed a change of scene. It always stimulates me to go to New York."

"So do!" Charlotte urged. "I notice you've been kind of restless lately and I think it will do you good."

"I'll have Libbie and Sue-Salome stay with you while I'm gone," Southward added. "You wouldn't be afraid with those girls here."

"I wouldn't be afraid all alone," Charlotte boasted. "I never was afraid when I was blind and now I've got my eyes I'm as brave as a lion."

Southward went upstairs to the garret, dragged down a trunk and a suitcase. "I think I'll take a trunk," she explained, "because after I get over there, I may feel like staying more than a few days."

"You be sure to stay just as long as you want," Charlotte advised fervently. "You need a change and a rest and I want that you should have it."

"It's a good thing that I chose a small trunk," Southward declared after packing. "I haven't clothes enough to fill a big one. The first thing I'm going to do when I get to New York is to buy some new duds. I hadn't realised how I'd let myself run down."

"You buy yourself all the pretty things you want!" Charlotte's fervour had not abated. "You've had a hard year what with Aunt Lorenza's death so sudden and Pearl's baby coming the way it did—not to mention all you went through with me in the spring. It's been a great shock to you. I guess you don't realise. I do though. You've changed very much, Southward."

"Have I?" asked Southward. She smiled enigmatically.

That afternoon she found Pearl alone with the baby when she went to make her daily call. She told her of the proposed trip to New York.

"I'm glad you're going, for your own sake, Southward," Pearl said. "for I think you really need a change. I shall miss you very much though, and I'm sure the baby will."

"I shall miss her," Southward declared, "and you too. I'm glad though to leave you perfectly well."

For a moment, silence fell. Pearl's eyes were riveted on her baby lying asleep in Southward's arms. But it was evident that,

for once, her gaze was not really on her child. Southward's glance had gone out of the window.

"Southward," Pearl broke the stillness at last, "there's something I want to say to you—something I've wanted to tell you for a long time. I've been trying to get up my courage to open the subject for over a week. I don't know that I could even have done it to-day if Lysander hadn't said to me something this morning that makes everything easy. He told me that he had never dreamed that he could know such happiness as our married life has brought him. When he said that, I found that I had the courage to talk about anything with you. And now you're going away——" She paused as though trying to collect her thoughts.

"Well, Pearl," Southward said, smiling, "it is quite evident to the most inobservant that Lysander is the happiest man in Shayneford."

"It's about Lysander that I want to talk," Pearl began. She had apparently heard Southward's comment without considering it. Now she was intent on her own thoughts. "I don't want that you should have the wrong idea about Lysander. I want that you should think just as highly of him as ever you did. And so I'm going to tell you that what happened—before we were married—wasn't Lysander's fault. It was mine. It never would have happened—never in *this world*——" Pearl's emphasis had a quality of solemnity, "—if I hadn't made him believe that he wasn't the first man with me. He was the first—but I lied to him. I'm telling you something, Southward, that I have never told anybody, not even my mother. But Lysander didn't go away that time to get out of any responsibility. He had to make a business trip. I thought it was all right for him to go and told him so. And then later when I realised that we must be married, I wrote him and telegraphed him. Everything was delayed getting to him. But he came the instant he could. I wasn't frightened. I knew he'd come. He nearly got down on his knees to ask my forgiveness when I told him the truth. And we were married that night. I can't bear to have you go away thinking—I don't mind what you think of me, but I want you to know that Lysander is as fine and honourable as a man can be."

"I know that, Pearl," Southward maintained. "Nothing that could happen could change my idea of Lysander. What you're telling me is none of my business. And I've been about enough now to know that we can't judge of these things at all, that what's on the inside is often very different from what appears on the

outside. As for my opinion of you—that's a matter of very little consequence. I have no opinion except that you are just the wife for Lysander and I don't care particularly how you happened to marry each other as long as you did it ultimately."

"I don't care either," Pearl said simply. "I'm so happy that all the rest of my life I'm going to try to deserve being so happy."

CHAPTER III

SOUTHWARD departed for New York the next day. She went at once to a little hotel in the Thirties between Fifth and Madison Avenues. The brilliant New York air produced its inevitable stimulation. Her step grew more springy, her expression more alert. She studied the faces of the people she passed with a vivid intensity. She lingered before shop windows with an amused interest. But although she wandered through shops, she bought none of the new clothes that she had insisted she must get. She went to the theatre alone and laughed heartily at the light entertainment provided for her there. For a week she saw nobody she knew; spoke to nobody but the hotel employees. Then suddenly, one day she ran into Morena.

"Southward," he exclaimed electrically and stopped in the middle of the sidewalk. "Fancy meeting you! You're the last person on earth I expected to see this day. Nevertheless you're a sight for sore eyes and my vision is entirely restored. How well you're looking! What a coat of tan! But you're thinner, aren't you?"

"I think I am," Southward answered. Her still composure contrasted with Morena's palpable embarrassment.

Morena turned and walked with her, talking on and on. Under the cover of his fluency, his confusion began to recede. That confusion had not at all nullified a delight, equally obvious, in seeing her. "I'm on my way to lunch," he ended finally. "Come with me. I'll take you to a nice little place that I think you've never seen."

"Thank you, I've lunched," Southward replied, "but I'll sit with you while you eat."

"When did you get in? How long are you going to be here? Where are you staying? How's Hester?" Morena bombarded her.

Southward answered all these questions with composure. "How is everybody?" she demanded in her turn. "Azile, Edith, Dwight, John, Ripley?" she added with explicitness. She looked Morena square in the eye.

They had turned into the little café near South Fifth Avenue which Morena had promised her, an Italian place, small and

crowded, but clean and inviting. Morena stopped to order his lunch and the cocktail in which alone Southward agreed to join him. These preliminaries concluded, he answered her questions. "We're all scattered. When you and Hester deserted us, you broke us up. We've never been the same crowd since. Poor Edith went to pieces in the spring and still isn't herself. Azile sailed for Paris later and hasn't come back yet."

"Yes, I heard all about that from Hester," Southward threw in. "I was awfully sorry too. I wrote Edith and got a nice letter from her. But that's all."

"Yes, she's been in the country ever since under a nurse's care—a friend of hers—that Miss Osgood. John and Ripley go out there constantly, but I've only been there once or twice. I think she still finds company a little too exciting. She seemed much improved the last time I saw her, but she's not well by any means yet. I have a suspicion that Edith had a close shave. Dwight"—he took the wine-card up and examined it but he talked straight through his scrutiny of the printed list—"had an attack of typhoid in the spring. He went up to his father's farm—you know Essex, New Hampshire—to recuperate. And he's been there ever since. I get a letter from him occasionally. He's writing, I understand, free-lance stuff. He refuses to say what, though."

"I'm glad he's got a chance to write what he prefers, at last," Southward commented coolly. "He's always wanted that."

"Ripley and John are on their separate jobs as usual. I guess that's about all the history we've made."

"What have you been doing?"

"Oh, the same old things," Morena answered, "missing you very much among them. Life lost a good deal of excitement when you left town, Southward. For one thing I'm never certain that I'll wake at the right hour in the morning. In fact I never do. Are you going to call me to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you wish," Southward agreed. "It will constitute my day's work. This is my vacation, you see. I've had rather a hard summer."

She told him briefly of her grandmother's death, of her grandfather's departure for the Circle and of the miracle that had been performed for Charlotte.

Morena listened with the quick Celtic sympathy which was one of his most agreeable attributes. He spoke of Mrs. Drake with a humorous appreciation that had a touch of affection. He applauded Mr. Drake's resolution to enter the Circle again and

made Southward promise she would share her grandfather's letters with him. He asked many interested questions about Charlotte. But he seemed to remember everybody that he had met in Shayneford. Beginning with Hallowell and Mrs. Crowell, he asked in detail about all his acquaintances there. "What are you doing to-night?" he concluded as they arose from the table.

"Nothing," Southward answered.

"Then will you go to the theatre with me? Dinner first of course. Have you seen anything?" He bought a paper and they selected the play immediately.

When Southward left him, her whole manner changed. All her repressed vitality seemed to bubble to the surface. That vitality expressed itself in immediate action. She bought a new suit, new blouses, gloves, shoes, a hat. The suit even departed a little from her characteristic boyish plainness; it was almost feminine in type. She expressed herself in the shop as pleased with the hat; but when it came late in the afternoon, she re-trimmed it. When Morena called that evening she was wearing her new clothes.

"My word, Southward, you are handsome!" Morena approved. In their short walk to the Broadway restaurant, which he had picked because it was near the theatre, he kept showering her with admiring side glances. "And you do put these New York women out. You always have. I suppose you always will. You're like a virile black-and-white in the midst of a lot of feeble water-colours."

"Thanks!" Southward said carelessly, "I haven't observed that effect myself. But of course it must be true if you say so."

They had a gay dinner accompanied by a cocktail and one of the delicious wines, light, white, dry, which Morena was an adept at choosing. Southward's spirits rose steadily. They were not the result of the wine, for she drank sparingly. In half an hour, the old relation had established itself; Morena pursuing half in jest and half in earnest; Southward evading, eluding, parrying, thrusting occasionally, and laughing all the time but with a suggestion of insecurity underneath.

It was a delightful evening. The play offered them all they had expected of it and even contained a surprise. Afterwards they went to a Broadway café which was more than usually crowded with celebrities and notorieties. Morena pointed them all out; flooded Southward with their high-coloured histories and the current gossip. They walked home in a clear crisp starry dark. Before he left, Morena engaged her for dinner again, an exhibi-

tion of pictures, a long tramp on Staten Island for the next Sunday.

This was the beginning of an intimacy that grew closer and closer. Morena never left Southward without assuring himself of as much of her company as it was possible to have. He had not lost his old-time *flair* for picturesque and characterised entertainment. They made the round of the restaurants in the various foreign quarters to which he had previously introduced her. He took her gradually to all the new places he had discovered. They went occasionally to the theatre; often to dance-halls. Oftenest of all they sat at the restaurant-table talking, until the waiters began to stack the chairs on the tables. Regularly every morning at eight, Southward waked Morena by telephone. They talked at these times for indefinite intervals. Sundays they devoted to tramps about the country.

Southward drifted on the current of all this experience. She invited no closer intimacy than their frank man-and-woman companionship; neither did she provoke it. But inevitably, as she placed no bars on its progress, it grew of its own volition. Now, whenever they walked after dark, Morena's hand carelessly held her arm. He often accented his remarks by a pat on her shoulder or on her hand. He lingered over the business of holding her coat. Sometimes his hands dropped on her shoulders and fell caressingly down her arm to her elbow. If Southward noticed this, she gave no sign. Certainly she never rebuked him. She drifted.

One evening, he spoke of a picture that had been sent him from Paris and suggested that he take her to his place to see it. He had a pair of rooms in a big old mansion just off Madison Avenue. Dignified and even beautiful, the rooms were large and high; the tall doors of solid mahogany; the knobs, locks, and hinges of silver. The windows, deeply recessed, were long, with low seats. Morena's taste in decoration fell somewhere between John's monastic plainness and Dwight's virile comfortableness; it was more subtle and sophisticated than either. One or two of the few pieces of furniture in his living-room were Spanish, the rest French. Except for the new oil, the portrait of a dancer, done in the futurist manner, there were no paintings. Above the low crowded bookcases however were pinned unframed prints and sketches.

Morena made coffee. While Southward sipped her cordial, Morena unpinned his pictures from the wall and brought them to her. Seeing that she was really interested, he showed her his

collection of foreign loot. Southward passed over the small litter quickly; but she examined the furniture with care. She told him of her own experiments in scraping, waxing, and polishing. They talked with much more seriousness than usual.

She stayed less than an hour. When she started to go, Morena did not suggest a delay. His manner had been quiet but deferential; almost he treated her with a distant courtesy.

They got into the way of going to his rooms for coffee; not always, for Morena himself often suggested cafés where he had found the coffee particularly good. Whatever his suggestions were, she fell in with them. In this, as in everything else, she continued to drift.

In the meantime the weather displayed a belated recrudescence of Indian summer. There came two days of soft warmth, winey sunshine, tender gauziness of vista. A big moon, as light as a bubble of golden water, swayed through the dewy purple skies. One night while still the moon stayed gold, they hurried through their dinner in order to ride on a Fifth Avenue stage.

It was about eleven o'clock when they returned and Morena asked Southward if she thought it was too late for coffee in his room. She said no.

The moonlight was shining straight through his windows and Morena pulled back the curtain draperies to give it complete access. He started to switch on the lights and then with a "Jove, no! This is too beautiful to ruin," lighted a few candles instead. The room was in half-darkness. Southward had seated herself on the couch after throwing off her hat and coat. She leaned among the cushions, one hand back of her neck, the other extending along the back of the couch. She contemplated the faery scene that the moonlight, mingled with candlelight, made; the quiet mellow walls; the darkly-carved bulks of the old furniture; the great patches of amethyst and silver on the polished floors; here and there the golden flicker of a candle-flame. It was as though for the first time in her life a purely sensuous delight had overtaken Southward; joy in the beauty of light and shade, thrown on colour. Her eyes softened dreamily. Smiles turned away her lips which were still the colour of raspberries and the texture of pearl, in a constant delicate flutter from her softly-gleaming little teeth.

Before starting the coffee, Morena came and sat at the foot of the couch. He contemplated her smiling, his arms folded.

"You are beautiful to-night, Southward," he said. "You know that I suppose. And tempting—and I suppose you know that

too. But if you know how tempting you are, you're not playing fair."

Southward did not answer.

He dipped forward suddenly and kissed the hand that lay along the back of the couch. Southward did not move, nor did she speak. But that ripple of her lips stopped. Otherwise she was passive.

With a sudden savage movement, Morena caught her in his arms, pulled her forward. Her head fell on his shoulder; rested there. Yet she remained passive. She drifted.

Morena paused an instant. Then his lips found hers; he kissed her many times. "I feel like a cad," he said once, "here in my rooms. But I can't help it."

Southward made no response even to this. She continued to lie in his arms without struggling. Morena hesitated an instant, stared haggardly at a patch of the moonlight; but his arms drew her closer—closer—

Then he stopped.

"If I only understood the whole situation," he groaned. "But you're such an elusive thing. I can't get you. Nobody can. There's something ungraspable about you—untamable. You are the last word as an enigma. I defy any man to beat your game. And yet all there is to it is silence and stillness. If I only understood you! I know Dwight's in love with you. He loves you as he's never loved any woman in my knowledge of him. And yet there's something—but you don't love him. You can't love him. You couldn't love him and treat him the way you do."

He stared with question into Southward's face as it lay pillowed on his shoulder. Her eyes were half-closed but she opened them wide and stared back at him. She did not speak.

"I can't tell now, damn you," he said. "I wonder if you know yourself? One thing I do know. I've always known it. You know it too, and you've always known it. And that is that there's something between us. Some bond that pulls us together. You knew it all that month I was in Shaynesford and you knew it all last winter when you were in New York. You're afraid of me. You're not afraid of Dwight, but you're afraid of me. I've always known that you were afraid of me. But you won't admit it to yourself. I don't know whether I love you or no. I'm crazy about you of course and to-night I'm—— But I'm not sure that I'm in love with you. You're a fascinating thing but you're hard."

He stopped and stared down at her again. Again Southward's closed lips parted before the impact of his sombre gaze. This

time she turned her look away. But she smiled. Never before perhaps had her lips curved in anything so definitely like invitation. Her little teeth looked in the moonlight like silver enamel and between them her slender tongue velvety-pink, offered another contrast as enticing as the blood-red crimson of her mouth.

Morena's clasp on her body grew tighter and tighter and yet he still held her loosely. Suddenly he pulled her close with a more determined savagery. He kissed her madly.

Southward still drifted.

Morena dropped her on the couch. He drew away. He knelt beside her. His lips crushed her lips. "I can't stand this—much longer—Southward—is it yes or no?"

But Southward did not speak. She might have been dead except that never could she have been more intensely alive.

"Oh, you devil-woman," Morena groaned. "You leave it to me. Well, I'll take my chance. I'll——"

Suddenly he leaped to his feet. "No, by God, I won't. You're too good for this. Dwight's in love with you. You're in love with him. You're eating your hearts out for each other. It's only that hellish pride of yours that won't let you admit it. I know it though and you know it. I'm going to take you home now. You're too damned plucky and fine for this sort of thing. And to-morrow you go back to Dwight. Don't let me see you again. I can save you once, but I can't do it a second time."

He picked up her coat.

CHAPTER IV

HESTER and her mother held no conversation on the way to the train. During the ride to Boston, their comments were few and mainly of superficial things: Tabby's perplexity over this strange experience, a new branch that the railroad was building. In Boston, Hester took complete charge of the situation. She kept it for the rest of the trip. They started for the West the next morning. In the meantime, leaving her mother at the hotel, Hester did a little shopping. When she came back, she was wearing a plain gold ring on the third finger of her left hand. "My name is now Mrs. Henry Fawcett, mother," she said, "Henry because it was father's name—Fawcett because that was his mother's name. You understand that I am a widow and my child will be a posthumous one."

Her mother made no comment on this, then or at any other time. Hester herself did not again refer to the subject. The five days of travel across the Continent were long, silent ones. Hester, who slept unaccustomedly late, always found her mother in the observation-car waiting for her. Mrs. Crowell, whose sleeper was across the aisle from Hester, was the first one up in the car. They rarely went into the observation-car during the day. For the most part, they remained in their own seats, reading or sewing. Mrs. Crowell sat for long periods with her gaze fastened to the flying landscape. Occasionally she made a comment on it but that was obviously when the whirl of her thoughts broke, producing blankness. In the evening, between their dinner and their early retirement, they read magazines in the observation-car. They responded to the overtures made by their fellow-passengers, but they did not encourage them.

"I think it will be best to keep house in San Francisco," Hester said once. "Perhaps we might board a little more cheaply. But I don't want to have to talk to people. I want to keep to myself as much as possible until it's all over."

"I want to keep to myself as much as possible for the rest of my life," her mother answered sombrely. "Oh, yes, there's no sense in trying to live any other way but in our own home."

When they reached Oakland, Hester again took charge of the

situation, and even more capable charge. It was necessary. Her mother was like a block of wood, propelled, in walking, by some mechanical power within. Crossing the bay, she gazed at the craft-crowded satin-smooth, blue waters, the islands green and velvety soft, the gulls swirling and creaking about the boat and San Francisco, on its many hills, riding steadily nearer and nearer, with a face which held one unchanging expression—stupefaction. That look deepened when they reached the city and gazing down Market Street, crowded, colourful, gay, she saw Twin Peaks making a drop-curtain in the air or gazed by accident up side streets whose tops broke abruptly against the sky.

They went at once to a little hotel of which Hester seemed to know before she came. They spent the next day looking for an apartment. Hester owned, it came out, a well-studied map of the city. Also, during the past few months she had read much fiction laid in California, and particularly about San Francisco. No country, except perhaps Italy, has topographically so stamped itself on its literature. She had a few very definite ideas in regard to localities. It was therefore not entirely due to accident that they ransacked Russian Hill first.

On the third day of their stay, they found a half-house on the highest part of that picturesque elevation. The rent was small because the house was old and sagging, ugly and inconvenient. In the early days of the gold-rush, it had been brought round the Horn by a sea-captain who set it up there. The five rooms which constituted Hester's share of the house were big, but tall, all out of proportion to their size. They bought as little furniture as possible; moved in within a week. The rooms had an effect of dreary bareness, but both women seemed impervious to this. Perhaps it was that neither could have been more absorbed in tragic reflection. But in addition, they knew few idle moments. They settled the house as soon as possible: afterwards they divided their time between housework and sewing. Mrs. Crowell in particular had turned into a silent, steadily-working piece of human mechanism. If it were warm, she worked outside, in the garden. When it was cold, she sat at the windows. And always she gazed with her perennial air of stupefaction on the strange combination of city, sea, sky, forest, and mountains on which she looked.

The windows, like the doors, were narrow but high. They let into their rooms constant floods of the brilliant Californian sunshine and sudden impulses of perfume from surrounding gardens. For this humble reminder of mining-camp days was now caught in a tangle of modern residences whose elaborate beauty aped

the simplicity of the old Spanish Mission. Their architecture accommodated itself perfectly to the sloping sides of the hill, on which it clung limpet-like, and harmonised perfectly in creamy walls and red roofs with the dazzling blue of sea and sky. Between these houses—and they too tumbled down hill—lay gardens which looked as old and perfected as anything New England had to offer with all the Californian lushness of growth beside. Sea and sky were near; forest not far; and mountains just beyond.

In front the city leaped swiftly to the bay, a jumble of houses of all sizes, shapes, colours, materials; ugly in near detail, picturesque in far-off mass; with close a white Spanish church offering beautiful but quiet contrast. The bay by day was awash with sea-craft. By night it lifted to their vision Oakland and Berkeley, levelled on clear nights to glittering star-sown planes and whipped on foggy ones to a foaming silver mist. San Francisco caught in a great web of diamonds; ferry-boats all ablaze weaving threads of fire between them.

At first their walks went no further than the tiny peak on which they lived. It commanded in one direction Telegraph Hill with the green trees at its top; Tamalpais to the left imprinting on the sky the soft contours of a sleeping woman; Mount Diablo further on lifting into the far background, as though presenting a gigantic problem in aerial geometry, a perfect blue triangle; Alcatraz floating on the bay, a rock-bound, white-palaced island in sunlight, a jewelled mosaic by moonlight; and everywhere, bounding San Francisco hills, covered with houses which looked like cubes of pearl.

But gradually they extended their walks. During the daytime, they wandered about the streets of the shopping district, gazing into the windows that offer the stranger unlimited entertainment; book shops, art shops; jewelry shops; photographers' showcases. At night they were very likely to turn to Market Street where a perpetual gaiety seemed for a while to take them out of themselves. Often though before going home, they passed through the department-store area, staring into big lighted windows where groups of wax figures displayed the latest fashion caprice from Paris. On Sundays, they treated themselves to a car-ride to the beach or a ferry-ride to Berkeley or Sausalito. These marked the limits of their explorations.

"Sometime when I'm better," Hester said once, employing the euphemism by which always she referred to the period after her child's birth, "we'll go to Muir Woods and Tamalpais. But I don't feel like it now."

Her mother assented with an indifferent, "Yes. I don't feel much like doing more than we have to do, myself."

Hester's pregnancy was a difficult one, even painful at times. She had weathered the nausea period but now came weakness, a lassitude, to which her former lassitude was a mere shadow; definite pain and discomfort. She had soon after her arrival put her case into the hands of a physician. He came at rare intervals to see how she was progressing. He did not seem perturbed by her condition. In answer to Mrs. Crowell's questions, he stated that all this, though uncomfortable, was normal enough. Some women had easy pregnancies, some difficult ones. The latter seemed to have no bad effects on the children. Hester bore her suffering with a fortitude that never broke or wavered. It did not add, however, to the meagre cheer of their situation.

CHAPTER V

THEIR neighbour in the other half of the house, with whom they maintained a decent civility, asked them once if they had been to Chinatown. To her, Hester said no, and to her mother, she added, "Well, isn't it strange that I should have forgotten all about there being a Chinatown here. Somehow it just went out of my mind."

They went to Chinatown that night after their early simple dinner. They arrived just as the lights came up. They stayed until after eleven o'clock. Finding all the elements of an entertainment as picturesque as though it had been premeditated, they continued to go to Chinatown, night after night. It had a curious effect on Mrs. Crowell; it brought her out of the stupefied lethargy into which she had fallen; for the first time she began to talk. Her memories of Shayneford went much farther back than the thirty years in which she had lived there—to over a half-century, indeed, when she had first gone there as a child. Sea-captains, active and retired, were plentiful on the Cape then. On their return trips, they brought great chests of Chinese treasure. Sometimes they brought back Chinese servants.

Passing the goldsmiths' windows where the manufacture of gold and jade and pearl jewelry was going on under their eyes, Mrs. Crowell said, "Cap'n Eli Snow brought Mrs. Snow a handsome set of that jewelry once from one of his voyages—a necklace and earrings and pins and a ring. I think Mis' Snow left it to Lucy Arabella." Exploring the strange shops, the commonest remark that came from her was something like, "Cap'n Sam Bassett brought a lot of that blue china home once. Maria Bassett never would use it though—so afraid she'd break a piece of it. Kept it for years in her china cabinet. And then when she died Rob's wife got it. Milly didn't have any idea of saving that or anything else. She used it every day. Those servants she brought on from New York broke it as though it wasn't worth anything. I don't believe in hoarding things up for other folks to enjoy"; or, "Mrs. Admeh Tobey had a whole set of those ivory elephants once. When you were a little girl and I used to take you there to call, you were just possessed to play with them. She always wanted to let you—she's an awful indulgent thing

with children—but I wouldn't have it. I was afraid you'd break one of them"; or, "Land, how that teakwood furniture takes me back. Cap'n Ike Nye had a whole dining-room full."

It was Mrs. Crowell who first suggested that they have some chop suey. And once inside the clean-looking Occidentalised restaurant, she scrutinised carefully the food served to other customers. She began to recognise the strange dishes that she had enjoyed in Cape Cod houses, food prepared by a China boy in a New England kitchen. "Oh, I remember that soup," she said, "with those great leaves floating round in it. It's delicious. I have had that chow mee—lots of times. And it's good. The next time we come down here, let's have some of that mock duck. You have no idea how delicious it is. I've always liked Chinese food."

"Well, mother, there's no reason why we shouldn't come down here two or three times a week," Hester offered. "Or oftener if you like. We can eat cheaper here than at home."

They went to Chinatown constantly thereafter. Gradually they picked up stray pieces of china, warmly decorated; bits of colour in the form of prints, embroidery, bric-à-brac. All this mitigated the dreary bareness of their rooms; insensibly they began to take on a look of homeliness and comfort.

But much as she interested herself in the shopping and the eating, it was to the Chinatown scene that Mrs. Crowell gave her fullest attention. The vegetable shops, meat shops, fish shops, crowded with familiar wares in strange shapes; the side streets papered for intervals with scarlet posters covered with black Chinese letters; toddling babies in their ugly combinations of American and Chinese clothes; the little pastel-coloured, silk-clad, coated-and-trouserred girls with ornaments of gold and jade in their sleek hair; the elderly women in black, convoying groups of gentle children; the constant procession of men in all possible variations of Oriental and Occidental wear—Mrs. Crowell drank the scene down. It was as though, having cast all the associations of her past life overboard, she were trying to fill out the shape of her soul with a new cargo, a cargo which should make up in the degree of its colour and strangeness for all the lost greynesses and familiarities.

"It seems queer, mother," Hester remarked once, "to think of Shayneford now, the quiet of it all—the big elms, the sleepy streets, the lonely houses."

"I feel," her mother said grimly, "as though I'd died and come to life in another world."

"Do you like this world, mother?" Hester asked timidly.

"I don't know. I'm not thinking about that. It isn't a question of whether I like it or not. It's forced on me. I take it as it comes."

The trip across the Continent had been a drain, taken with Hester's long stay in New York, on the slender resources of the two women. They involved themselves in no unnecessary expense now. Theatres, concerts, lectures knew them not. An occasional picture-show was the height of their dissipation. Books and magazines were also proscribed. Literature came to them through their one newspaper. They had happened by accident to choose the most radical of the city journals and, partly because of the hunger of a literature-starved consciousness and partly through the interest of the thing itself, they read this paper carefully from beginning to end. Insensibly they came to know San Francisco, the seething quality of its social life, the virility of its labour movement; the intensity of its politics; the enlightened activity of its enfranchised women: insensibly they came to realise the picturesqueness of a people who flash from an athletic outdoor day life to a gorgeous restaurant night life and who entertain themselves with pageant, fiesta, and carnival somewhere in between.

But as for the boiling city life itself, it passed the two lonely women as completely as though they were an island and it the ocean which surrounded them. Their neighbours in the other half of the house, their butcher, their grocer, their cobbler, the boy who brought their paper, the waiter who served them in Chinatown—this was the list of their human affiliations. Twice Hester suggested that her mother go to church, but the second time Mrs. Crowell rejected this idea with so steadfast a grimness that Hester never alluded to it again. A little cooking, a little sewing, a little gardening, talk on what was obvious and of the moment—the program of one day did not differ from that of another. This monotony was not even stirred by the mail. Mrs. Crowell had announced that she was going to break off all connection with Shayneford for the time being. She had written to nobody. Hester had not even sent the letters she had spoken of writing to Southward and John.

In the meantime, the golden, rainless, sun-charged California summer merged with the drab-coloured, rainless, still-sunny California fall. The rains began to come. And the hills which had turned from gold to grey became green in a night. The tangled garden which by this time Mrs. Crowell had cleaned out completely put on new growths.

"Seems queer to have everything starting up at the approach of winter," Mrs. Crowell commented. "What a strange country!"

The rainy season that year was of unexampled copiousness, fury, and duration. The sun seemed to disappear for good. Day after day, they stared out on a sodden world. And now they were giving up their excursions to Chinatown, mainly because of the weather. Also, Hester's time was approaching.

There was no abatement towards the end of her suffering and discomfort; rather it increased. Great hollows encircled her eyes. Weights of pain and anguish pulled down the corners of her mouth. Her pallor was not white but leaden. She dragged about the garden when the weather permitted, sat during the rains for long periods gazing out the window. But if unhappiness ever formed words of regret upon her lips, her will never permitted them to pass.

One day, she and her mother were sitting outside together. It was a little past the middle of December and they had had two days of unexpected sunshine and warmth. For a while they had entertained themselves with the new family that Tabby had recently produced. Now they sat silent, watching the many ferry-boats charging across the bay like peacocks who dragged after them great thick tails of white feathers. The sun began to dim and pulling their wraps about them, they watched one of the bay fogs creep in from the ocean, blot out the hill country across the water, and take possession of the city. Hester arose presently and went into the house. Her mother still stayed; still apathetically watched this aerial siege.

"Mother, Mother!" Hester's voice called suddenly. It had a new note in it, command that was pointed by expectancy and even touched with relief. "Come here quick!"

Her mother arose swiftly and, more swiftly still, ran into the house.

"It's come, mother," Hester said, "I've been in pain all the time I sat there in the garden. But I couldn't believe it. I've suffered so, I was afraid I was fooling myself."

Her face contracted as a violent paroxysm seized her.

"There, there! I guess there's no doubt. You'd better call Dr. Cartwright at once."

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. CROWELL sat in her daughter's bedroom holding her grandson in her arms. Hester was asleep and so was her child. But Mrs. Crowell was very wide-awake indeed. Her big, old eyes, unusually brilliant in a deep setting of shadow, flew from the baby's face to Hester's, from Hester's back to the baby's. Occasionally she bent forward and deposited a little soundless kiss on the wrinkled red forehead at her shoulder; but the baby slept on. Once or twice, she moved noiselessly from bed to window, but Hester, utterly relaxed, slept on also. After a while, Mrs. Crowell went silently out of the room, deposited the baby in his crib in her own chamber. When she came back, Hester's eyes, still sleep-filled, were half-open.

"Is the baby awake, mother?" Hester asked.

"No," her mother answered, "sleeping soundly. I never saw such a good child for sleeping."

Hester's lips curved into a smile. "I like to have you call him, 'child.' It sounds so much more permanent than 'baby.'"

"Well, he's certainly a permanent-looking child," Mrs. Crowell commented with a kind of grim pride. "He's an awful big fellow. I suppose you don't realise, because the doctor says it was a normal birth. But a twelve-pound baby is a big baby."

"I realise something," Hester showed a touch of her mother's grimness. "I feel as though I'd lost twenty-four pounds. Sit down, mother. I want to talk to you."

Mrs. Crowell sat down but it was as though under protest. "I don't know as I'd do much talking, Hester," she remonstrated.

"I won't," Hester answered docilely, "but I do feel like talking a little, especially since it's so long now that I haven't talked. I've kept silence all these months, mother, for the baby's sake and for my own. But now I want to tell you something about it all, so that we can go on with our new life together on a different basis—without suspicions or misunderstandings."

"I don't know that there's any call for you to tell me anything further," her mother announced stiffly. "Perhaps in the beginning—well, I don't say but what it would have relieved my mind some. But now the thing's over and done with——"

"But I want to tell you, mother," Hester said bearing down on the word *want*.

"Tell me when you get well," her mother evaded.

"I want to tell you now." There was a hysteric element in Hester's stress of the word *now*. "It's here to be said and I must say it. It's in me and it must out. I can't wait. I want to get it over with." Her tone became a little wild.

"All right," her mother decided after a reflective instant. "Go on! I'm listening."

Hester went on and with an unexpected composure into which her wildness suddenly simmered. "I don't know what you've been thinking all these months, mother, but I can guess some of it. I can guess some, but not all. I wonder if you think I'm really what you call a bad girl, that I've done that sort of thing always or often, or that I care for promiscuity or that I'd like that kind of life. If you believe any of these things, you are wrong. It's not true. And yet if not blaming myself much is bad, then I *am* bad. For as I look back on my life—and, oh, I've been studying it hard these last nine months—I feel that I'm not so very much to blame. Sometimes I pity myself. Sometimes it seems to me even that it had to be. You see the trouble started with my being the daughter of a woman who had been a beauty and yet not being beautiful or attractive myself. So many lives are wrong—especially women's lives. I see now in the light of my own life how wrong your life was. Here you were, a woman loving life and gaiety, music, theatres, excitement, and people about you, condemned to live in a little dead country village. That life hurt you, maimed you. You aren't now at all the woman you would have been if you'd been placed in the proper environment. But you didn't learn by your own experience; for you made the same mistake with me. I have never had the proper environment. It was all natural enough, perhaps. I was a disappointment to you and you never tried to conceal it from me. On the other hand, Bee was a delight to you as she was to me. You loved her with all your heart and so did I. All the affection that had been starved out of both of us, we put into her. Then Baby Bee came. We were both happy, you and I. I didn't really start to be definitely unhappy until they died. But after that—well, mother, you will never know how I suffered as I shall probably never realise how much you suffered. But I did suffer—horribly—horribly——"

Her mother started to rise. "Don't think of it any more, Hester. Try to go to sleep."

"I don't want to go to sleep, mother. I want to talk. I want to tell you all about it." Hester's eyes had shed all the dews of her rest; they shone with an unsteady gleam. A faint colour fluttered back and forth in her white cheeks. "You know well enough what a disappointment I was to you. But you don't know what a disappointment I was to myself. I had never thought of myself as pretty while I was growing up; indeed, I knew very well that I was not even ordinarily good-looking. I was the kind of girl of whom everybody said, 'but she has beautiful hair.' Oh, how I clung to the thought of my hair, my single beauty. Yes, I know just as well as anybody else how plain I was. People didn't have to tell me that—but they did tell me it in a variety of ways. They tortured me with it. But somehow from my littlest girlhood, I took it for granted that I'd marry some day and have children of my own—a lot of them—a big, big family. Somehow I was perfectly sure that I was going to have babies just as fast as I could have them. I hoped they would be beautiful, but I knew they couldn't all be so, and, oh, how loving and tender I was going to be with the plain ones, so that they would never know that they were plain. I took marriage and motherhood just as much for granted as I did breathing. I thought everybody got married and everybody had children. Well—you know what my girlhood was like. Men never took any notice of me whatever. I didn't mind that so much on the score of vanity, for, God knows, I had as little vanity as any woman who was ever born. But it hurt me terribly when I saw what a disappointment it was to you. When I used to go to parties that the girls gave and they played kissing games, I used to pray that one of the boys would choose me—only one—because it seemed to me I would die of mortification if you heard that I was the only girl there who was not kissed. I can't remember now when it was that it first occurred to me that maybe no man would ever want to marry me. I think I was about twenty. From twenty to thirty was one long misery that I know, all my life, I shall hate to look back on—the gradually growing certainty that whatever it was that other women had about them that attracted men, I didn't have it. I didn't know how to get it; for I didn't know what it was. I have never flirted in my life. I never had any instinctive coquetries. From the beginning, I have never been able to talk to a man except as one human being to another. I can't think of him as a sexed creature first. And then as I began slowly to realise that, although I wanted to attract somebody—and I had my moments when I

thought almost anybody would do—I didn't have the faintest degree of charm for men, it made me self-conscious, awkward, tongue-tied. Sometimes I met men whom I would have enjoyed talking with, but they never seemed to see me at all. I mean literally they did not seem to *see* me. It was as though I wasn't there. I've been at parties with Pearl and Pinkie and Flora, when they were flirting with men, and it was just as though a transparent curtain had come down between them and me. I was with them but not of them. I could see and hear and understand everything they were doing and saying but they didn't even know I was there. And so it went on. I began to have periods of despair."

Her mother interposed again. "Hester, I'm going out of this room. You must control yourself. It will affect your milk—all this excitement—and the baby'll suffer."

"Stay here, mother!" Hester said in a low tone of command. "If you go, I shall talk just the same. Only I'll have to shout in order to make you hear me. What I'm going to say, is like the baby. It's got to be born. It's started and nobody can hold it back."

That wild light in Hester's eyes had steadied to a permanent glow. That flicker of colour had beaten to a changeless flame. She went on:

"John Smith appeared in Shayneford. And then came my one little triumph. He was the handsomest and ablest and kindest, the most graceful and charming and distinguished man that I had ever met. I fell in love with him. You know that. But what you don't know is that he fell in love with me. I've never told anybody that. But it is true. He fell in love with me. The only man I ever really wanted—and the finest man I ever met—fell in love with me. I knew it the instant it happened. I knew it before he knew it. I could not believe my own intuition at first. I thought I believed it only because I wanted to believe it. But after a while, I had to believe it. From the beginning though, subconsciously, I knew that there was something wrong. I didn't know that consciously though for a long time. And then gradually I had to recognise that truth, that there was some obstacle between us. And in New York—oh, I had a wonderful time in New York. I was with him more and more until in the spring we were so much together that it was almost like a honeymoon. Oh, those long wonderful days and those long beautiful evenings! I shall never forget them. I couldn't forget them if I tried. They will be fresh and warm in my memory

when I lie in my tomb. I don't think now that he would ever have told me that he loved me if I hadn't provoked it from him. I didn't exactly mean to do that. But when I realised that he loved me, a certain power came to me, a power that I had never had, the power to coquet. And once I used it—just once. All in an instant, I provoked him to that declaration. And then everything came out. He did love me—as I had guessed. I was the only woman in the world for him. I was the culmination of his whole life. But he couldn't marry me. There was an obstacle."

She paused and her face contracted. Her mother arose. "I think I heard the baby cry," she said, "I'll be back in a moment." She disappeared but she returned presently. Hester took up her narrative just where she had left it.

"All the time I stayed in New York, I had been having a curious series of experiences. I suppose it was my own sensitiveness to the subject but everybody seemed to be talking about motherhood. The night we arrived, John and Dwight took us to a meeting of a Socialist Local. When we came in, a young girl was making a speech. At first I could not believe my ears. She was talking about motherhood and she said that the right to bear children was inalienable to any healthy normal woman—that marriage or morality or religion had nothing to do with it. I had never heard such ideas and the first effect of her speech was actually to frighten me. I trembled for an hour afterwards. But I thought of what she said—and thought of it—and thought of it—and thought of it. It haunted me and after a while I began— And then I kept meeting women who were the result of motherhood, wrong, thwarted motherhood or the complete absence of it. And oh, how I pitied them. How I hated to think I might grow to be like them. Just derelicts floating on an uneasy sea of experience, never getting to any real port of life—marriage or maternity. There was Edith Hale. She was thwarted by her very love of luxury, comfort, beauty, ease, devotion to her own figure. There was Rena Osgood, a nurse. She loved children just as much as I did and wanted them as much. But she had had to undergo a severe operation and that operation made maternity forever impossible. There was Mrs. Pelham, a widow. She was the only one in that group who had had a child. He lived to manhood and then died, lost in a desert. It nearly killed her. Oh, how I pitied her. I told her once that it seemed to me I would rather not have had him. She said no—no—no. She said that that was the one consolation of her

life that she *had* had him. And that they had had those twenty years together. She wouldn't give up the memory of that for anything. She would never have been the woman she was, without it. And there *was* something different about her. She had something that we others didn't have. I don't know what it was or how to describe it, but there it was, as plain to me as though it were a golden star set in her forehead. And then there was an old, old lady, nearly ninety, a Mrs. Edgerley, a woman suffragist—who used to come down from an apartment above to talk suffrage to me. Oh, she was such a wonderful old lady. She'd been in that work all her life, though she had brought up a large family of children too. I could see that one had helped the other. She tried to make me march in the parade, to convert me. But I never could seem to think or care about suffrage, although I could see what happiness it had brought into her life, believing in something with all her heart and soul and working for it with all her mind and body. It had brought happiness into her children's lives too. There was her daughter, a Mrs. Fanshawe—she had seven children, a pair of twins among them. She'd grown up believing in woman suffrage and she'd worked for it all her life. Worked for it just as naturally as she had for those seven children. I used to try my hardest to get interested in it; for of course I believed in it. But I couldn't do it; nor in any other movement, even those that John and Ripley were working for. They tried to interest me too. They tried to make me read books. But somehow, I couldn't seem to get my mind on those things."

"Hester, don't you think you'd better stop talking now?" her mother pleaded.

"Not till I've had my say," Hester answered inflexibly. "All these things had been turning over and over in my head. I didn't keep them there. I didn't know that some of them *were* there. And the others I tried to get rid of. But they stayed. When John told me there was an obstacle—I—I'm not going to tell you what that obstacle was. It's not my secret. It's his. It wasn't a wife or a mistress. In a way it was more binding than either of those. I saw that it was hopeless, that we could never be married. I realised that I must give him up—give him up completely and give him up at once. And then—I thought of everything before—even suicide. But I couldn't. And yet—all I knew was that something had to happen or I would drop back into an unhappiness even more dreadful than I had ever known. And I thought—and I thought—and then—the idea came.

I knew I would have to do it at once or not at all. I knew I would have to do it when I was so desperately unhappy that it was as though it happened to somebody else. I knew if I waited until I had accustomed myself to life without him, I never could—that I'd love his memory too much. I knew that I must act quick—as one steals or murders. And so one night, I put paint on my face and long earrings in my ears and I went out—and I went up to the Grand Central Station—and I stood there—and waited—and waited—and waited—and I looked at all the men as they passed—I looked carefully—and most of them seemed horrible to me. And at last there came along a great big country boy with cheeks like apples—and red hair—and nice frank eyes—with that look the country gives—of cleanness—he looked like Lysander a little—and—and—and—I spoke to him—and—and—we went together—and that next morning he told me he was going to Washington—and I suggested that I go too—paying my own way—as I had never seen Washington—— He said yes, come—he didn't have much money—he was going to do his travelling as cheaply as possible—you see I wanted to make sure—and—and—and so I went and I was gone three weeks in Washington and Baltimore and Richmond. Of course it all seems horrible to you—perhaps it was horrible—but it was not horrible to me—it was very simple—oh, very simple. And yet all the time—I was in love with another man. But I liked that boy—he was kind and considerate in a simple boyish way—I could never have fallen in love with him—but I liked him—and respected him. We used to talk about the things we were seeing—and about his life in the country. I made him talk about country things—the farmhouse and the live stock—I knew every animal on the place by name, and all their markings. We had a kind of friendship and I felt that he grew to like me—so much so—that in the end I slipped away—without letting him know I was going—I just disappeared. He never knew anything about me—not even my name. He never will know. Perhaps some day he will realise that he had a strange experience. And then I came back to New York and waited—and waited—and waited. Oh, I was so afraid that I had failed. There was only one terror in my life—the fear that I had failed. And then I went to the doctor and he said it was true. That day—that day—when I came out of his office onto the street—I heard music. I went over to the Avenue and found the suffrage parade had just started and I stood there from three in the afternoon until eight at night and watched that parade. And then it came to me as I looked at those

women—oh, and some had such happy, happy faces—that I ought to have been with them—marching and fighting too. I ought to have been having children and working with them just as Mrs. Edgerley had and Mrs. Fanshawe was doing. But my life was wasted. I had been born with the maternal craving—I wanted to be a mother—it didn't come about naturally for me to have children—and so all the best years of my life and the best energy had gone to fighting that craving. Other things had happened to make it worse, and so I was like a creature caught in a net and struggling there. All about me were great world movements—and I couldn't get into one of them—because I was all tangled up in that net. Life does that. It did it to you in a different way—and to poor Pearl who couldn't get into right relations with people because she loved Lysander so madly. And it did it to Gert Beebee and Josie Caldwell. When I got home that night, I did not know myself when I looked in the glass—my face was so swollen and bloated. I had been crying all those five hours but I didn't know I was crying. Well, I waited two months longer in New York. And then I went to Shayneford. I didn't expect you'd come out here with me. But oh, how grateful I was that you did, how grateful I am now! But don't think, mother, that I haven't suffered all these six months here. I've lived in hell. Do you suppose I haven't had my terrors and horrors—and worse—doubts. Sometimes I've been dizzy with them. Sometimes it's seemed to me that I must throw myself into the bay. And I've often been so sick—so deathly sick—and weak. But something held me up—I don't know what. And I wouldn't have gone back. I don't say that I did right. But I do say that when you put that baby in my arms—my own baby that I'd gone through hell to get—everything seemed all right, I only knew that I'd have gone through it again and twenty times over—to get him.”

“Hester,” her mother said beseechingly.

“I'm not going to talk any more, mother. I know when you went to the baby that time, you called Dr. Cartwright. I'd have heard my baby if he'd cried. It wasn't necessary though. You'll see when he comes.”

She sank back among the pillows.

When Dr. Cartwright arrived, she was sleeping quietly, pulse and temperature normal.

“She's all right,” he said. “That talk must have done her good.”

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Southward stepped off the train into the little station at Essex, she found waiting there one dilapidated carriage drawn by an aged horse and driven by a more aged darkey.

"Take me to the Cameron place," she said briefly.

"All right, lady," the darkey agreed cheerfully. He touched the old horse with the whip and succeeded in evoking motion from him. They ambled through a heterogeneous railroad station neighbourhood and came out finally on a wide elm-bordered main street. Big old white-clapboarded houses and big old red-brick houses with green blinds and fan-lighted doors, with gardens and orchards, made agreeable oases between groups of village stores.

Their way ran past these, past the Post Office, the Town Hall, the bank, a church or two, and what was apparently the village library, to the other side of the town. Here houses came at longer intervals. At last they stopped at a big yellow place, long and comfortably low, set back from the road.

Southward alighted, paid the driver. She walked quickly up the path and produced a series of firm raps from the old brass knocker. She turned about and stood absently gazing at the scene, the wide street, the interlacing bare tree boughs, the meadowlands back and, beyond all, hills that were almost mountains. A light fall of snow covered everything and the sun was making a magic glitter on it.

"What was you wanting?" a voice asked.

Southward turned. A middle-aged woman, her hair still in curling pins, had opened the door.

"I'd like to see Mr. Cameron," Southward said.

"Well, old man Cameron has jess gone down to the village—you must have passed him. Young man Cameron is in the back setting-room, writing."

"It's young Mr. Cameron I want to see," Southward declared. "I'll go right in there." She passed down the hall. The woman stood in a state of paralysed dubiety for an instant. Then, obviously evading the solution of this social problem, she turned into the other side of the house. Southward continued down the broad central-hall to the back room. The door was ajar and she pushed it noiselessly open.

Within, seated at a big table at right angles with the fireplace, Dwight sat writing. He looked a very different man from the one Southward had seen last in New York, heavier, more serious. Perhaps it was his white outing-shirt whose looseness made him seem bigger, and perhaps its whiteness deepened by contrast a thick coat of tan. He was absorbed in his work.

Southward came forward. Her footsteps made no sound on the thick carpet. Nothing apprised Dwight of an alien presence until she was almost at his side. He looked up with a start.

Then he did not speak. Obviously he could not. He sat, staring.

Southward extended her hand. It held her revolver, butt forward. "I've come to give you this, Dwight," she said quietly. "I shall never shoot another man."

Dwight's eyes filled with tears. But he looked steadily down into Southward's eyes, which gradually filled also. He took the hand that held the revolver between both his own and drew her to him. For a long time they stood silent, their lips together. "I knew you'd come some day," Dwight said at last.

Then Southward drew herself away. "I've got something to tell you first, Dwight. I've been in New York a month. I've been flirting with Morena—flirting desperately. I would like to say that I flirted out of pique and that's true, but not entirely so. Morena has always had a kind of attraction for me. For a long time I would not admit it to myself. I do now. But I'm not in love with him. I'm in love with you. Of course I was insane with jealousy when I found you with Azile that time. I made up my mind that I'd uproot every feeling for you that was in me. I didn't do it though. I couldn't. And when I went to New York and met Morena by accident and he seemed ready to start something, I fell in with it. And last night—I—very nearly went over the line. I would have too—if it hadn't been for Morena. He saved me from myself. He was fine. He was splendid. He roused me too to a sense of where I was drifting. He told me that I was in love with you and you were in love with me. He told me to go to you. I saw he was right and I came as soon as I could get here. I love you. But I want you to understand the situation; for it might make a difference to you. I haven't understated it. I nearly drifted over the line. I nearly did myself what I was ready to shoot you for doing. Do you understand?"

"I understand perfectly," Dwight said steadily. "And of course it makes no difference." He drew her to him again. "I love you—I love you, Southward."

Southward returned his kisses. "Ah," she murmured, "men are more generous than women."

"Not that exactly," Dwight explained, "it's only that they understand." He held her off at arm's length for a moment and looked at her hard. "You are handsome, Southward," he said. "I don't know though but that beautiful's the word."

"Of course beautiful's the word," Southward maintained. "It's admitted universally now." She withdrew herself from his arms, seated herself on the couch by the fire. "There's so much to talk about," she said.

Dwight seated himself beside her and their lips met again. "That's true, but we've got all eternity to do it in." There's really only one thing that we must settle this moment and that is, when will you marry me?"

"As soon as you like," Southward answered.

"How about to-day?" returned Dwight. "I can fix it up in no time. There's nobody at this end of the line except father who really counts. And he'll be back in an hour. We can be married in fifteen minutes in this very room."

"I'd love that," Southward affirmed. "I'd simply love it. Off-hand like that. In the bridegroom's house. They'd say you married me at the point of my revolver."

Dwight laughed. "I pretty nearly have."

Southward's mirth glimmered. "That's true. But though I'd rather do that myself, for Charlotte's sake I must go home."

"How soon can it be then?" Dwight asked in a business-like tone.

Southward cast her eyes towards the ceiling. She meditated aloud. "To-day is Tuesday. I'll go home in the late afternoon train. I'll buy myself a wedding-dress in Boston to-morrow. I really owe that wedding-dress to Charlotte. And for her sake I may invite just a few to the wedding. Let me see—Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. How would Saturday at noon do?"

"All right," Dwight agreed. "Father and I will be at Shayneford Friday night at the latest. In fact I think I'll go back with you. That's settled." He sighed contentedly.

"Yes, that's all the consideration we need to give that," Southward agreed.

They laughed a little.

"Southward!" Dwight exclaimed abruptly, "about Azile. It wasn't quite what you thought——"

"I know all about that," Southward interrupted. "Azile came

to Shayneford within a month and told me the whole story. She took all the blame on herself."

"Well—hang it—that wasn't right," Dwight protested. "There's no blame exactly—or if there is, it's on me. That was fine of her though," he added with an accent of real admiration. "But then Azile was always a gentleman and a true sport."

"Yes," Southward agreed, "it was fine. I've always hated her, you know. But of all the women I've ever hated, I like her the best. I don't suppose I shall see her again. She's in Paris now. What have you been doing all these months?"

"Oh, chores; farming, sowing, planting, weeding, harvesting, pitching hay, looking after the live stock, and chopping wood. Then recently I've done a lot of writing. I had an awful sourballed session when I got up here first. I found out more things about myself in a few weeks than I'd ever known before. One was that I wasn't a novelist. You know those three partly-written novels I had. Well, I made a bonfire of all of them. And I gave up then any idea that I was going to be a fiction-writer."

"I'm glad of that," Southward announced frankly.

"Don't gloat too soon, woman," Cameron checked her. "I may turn out to be a writer after all. In two months I wrote and got accepted a boys' book and, believe me, it's some book. All about the things we used to do up here when I was a kid. We formed ourselves into rival Indian tribes, and we used to wage wars in the woods, that lasted a whole vacation. We had battles, took prisoners, exchanged them, and all that sort of thing. I had the time of my life writing that book."

"I'd like to read *that*," Southward exclaimed.

"Don't worry!" Dwight reassured her. "You'll have to."

Later he asked casually, "Want to go to South America? I have Spanish, you know, and a magazine has asked me to do a series of articles dealing with commercial relations between the two continents. Not immediately. Sometime within a year. Would you like to go?"

"Would I?" Southward answered. She added after a moment's thought, "I want to live at Long Lanes until we leave, though—on Charlotte's account."

"All right," Dwight agreed. "One place suits me as well as another. I think I may turn out another boys' book in that time. You can help me on that. But I think I'll probably become an 'events' man. That means that wherever there's trouble, we'd go to it. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Southward did not answer.

Assuming assent apparently, he went on. "I've always wanted to see Latin America, beginning with Mexico and running south to Patagonia. Then I'd like to go to the Orient sometime, China, Japan, India, Egypt. You want to see those countries, don't you?"

He waited. Again Southward was silent.

Again assuming assent, he sped on. "And I've always wanted, more than anything else, to cruise among the islands of the Southern Pacific—Australia, New Zealand. I guess when it comes to cities they're pretty much alike wherever you find them. But those islands would be different from anything else on top of the earth, think of Borneo, for instance. And Java! Oh, there's a lot of the world I want to see. You want to see it, too, don't you?" He waited. And then as though struck for the first time by her silence, "You do, don't you?" he repeated.

Southward arose and stood with her elbow on the mantel. She gazed into the fire. "I do and I don't," she answered. Then she transferred her gaze directly to Dwight's face. "I do awfully and yet I don't want it to interfere with one thing. And that is—a family. I want a family, Dwight, a big family. I don't want to do anything that's going to get in the way of that, even travel. And you don't know how much I want to travel. But in the last year, I've done a lot of thinking too. I've got pretty well acquainted with myself and I found out that I'm not at all the kind of woman I thought I was. You see I grew up with the idea that I was different from ordinary women, that I had unusual abilities. I've learned that I'm not different at all, that I haven't any special ability of any kind, only great physical strength, vitality, energy, and an instinct for efficiency. I suppose the reason I got the idea of my own superiority was because we Drakes have always dominated Shayneford and because almost any girl could put it over the average girl in Shayneford. When I went to New York, I found it was all different there. I wasn't a bit more able or interesting than the run of women I was meeting and not half so clever as many. Why, Dwight, there isn't one blessed thing I can do besides fix up old furniture, garden, and dressmake in the most primitive manner. But that isn't all. I've had a great understanding with myself in regard to a lot of other things. All my life I had seen the Shayneford women getting married, bringing large families into the world, and working hard so that, by the time they reached their thirties, they were faded, bent, unattractive old women. I made up my mind I wasn't going to get caught by life that way. I thought I was never going to marry. I

thought if I did marry I should never have any children. I thought that for a long time—until you came to Shayneford. And then things began to happen to me.”

She paused, shifted her gaze to the fire and then back to Dwight's face. Dwight did not move. He sat listening intensely. He looked at her intently.

“I met you. Frankly, at first all I wanted to do was to make a conquest of you. I see now that I've always been pretty ruthless as far as men are concerned. But when I discovered that that wasn't going to be easy, I fell in love with you as quickly as any woman would. And then came all that sense of rivalry with Azile Morrow, my certainty that I had beaten her, the trip to Shayneford, back to New York, the frenzy of rage and jealousy when I saw you together—the shooting. You don't know what that did to me. I can't tell you—it's too monumental. I had shot another man, you remember. But that wasn't such a terrible thing; that was self-defence. But this was just wanton murderous rage. I didn't know until the next day that I hadn't killed you. I thought I had. During those hours I lived in hell. Deep down, I knew that I loved you with all my heart. There was the grief of that. And then I was frightened of the consequences. I wasn't too proud to admit my sense of relief when the news came that you were safe. But I still tried to make myself believe that I hated you. And then Azile Morrow came and did her best to exonerate you. I could have killed her. I was too proud to forgive you. I could not bear to think—I couldn't stand it—that she had got away with her game even for a moment. But I continued to live in hell. I suppose that I very nearly had nervous breakdown. The quiet out-of-door life saved me from that. It shook me though—that experience—it ‘rocked’ me as Buster Welch would say. I suppose all kinds of queer things were going on inside; psychological changes. One morning Lysander Manning got me out of bed to come down and take care of Pearl while he went for the doctor. The baby had just been born as I entered the room. I had to help Mrs. Wallis. In fact, I gave the baby its first bath. I don't know what it was, or what happened to me. I've always hated babies and this one looked just as red and uninteresting as any one I've ever seen. Perhaps it was because I felt that I'd helped in a way to bring it into the world. Anyway when I took it into my arms, the greatest feeling came over me—why, Dwight, I was wild about that child. I was ashamed of my feeling. I wouldn't let anybody know. Nobody guessed it but Pearl. I went to see it every single day until I went to New York. And then it came to me that I'd

like awfully to have a child of my own. I want sons—and daughters too. I want a big family. And then, there's another side of it. I've got energy and activity and vitality enough for two women. Without plenty of work and plenty of hard work, I'll always be in mischief. I'm as dangerous to have around as an unused stick of dynamite. I want children. I want them to come just as fast as I can have them, so that my hands will be full all the time, just taking care of them."

Dwight did not answer for a moment. But he still looked at her with an extraordinary tender intentness. "I'm glad you feel that way, Southward," he said.

Their talk wandered to their friends.

"Where is Hester?" Dwight demanded first.

"I don't know," Southward answered. "Nobody knows. She and her mother just vanished. I'll hear some day. Hester'll write. I have a feeling somehow that Hester's married."

From Hester, the conversation went to Edith, John, the rest of the New York group; zigzagged to Shayneford, to Mr. Drake and Lysander, and Pearl, Matthew Hallowell, Gert Welch.

"And Charlotte's sight is completely restored?" Dwight asked.

"Completely—or nearly so," Southward answered. "She thinks she sees as well as I do, but I don't think she does. That reminds me, Dwight, I must always have Charlotte with me except of course when we're travelling. She's my responsibility. And then I'm very fond of her, as you will be in time. But aside from that, it would be cruel to send her anywhere else to live, no matter how well provided for she was."

Dwight made an impatient gesture. "Of course! You don't think you've got to argue that with me."

"No. But I want you to understand. I'm going to tell you Charlotte's story, Dwight. Nobody in Shayneford knew this except grandfather, grandmother, and Hester. Charlotte is about forty-five. When she was eighteen and really nothing but a little girl, very innocent and inexperienced, she had a music teacher, a man. He was much older than she, a real musician, very handsome and fascinating, people said. He was married but nobody knew it. He prevailed upon her to elope with him. Her father discovered it immediately, and pursued them. They had been gone just two hours and all that time they were on a train; he caught them as they got off. He took Charlotte home. The whole story came out through the man's wife. Charlotte's people lived in a small town, but the gossip was frightful. She became a social pariah. It never occurred to the family to send Charlotte away anywhere

and she stayed on living there, under conditions that make my blood boil still, whenever I think of them. Charlotte always left the room when callers appeared. Her younger sisters grew up, were invited out, gave parties of their own, but Charlotte was never included in any of it. She was no more part of the family's social life than as though she were dead. She lived in their house like a ghost who was haunting it. That kept up for over ten years. Then my grandfather went to visit them. Of course he'd seen enough of the world to have a more enlightened point of view on such things. Anyway he was appalled by the hideousness of Charlotte's situation. He asked them to let Charlotte come to live with us. In the meantime she had gone blind. Some members of her family looked on that as her punishment. My grandmother told me Charlotte's story as a sort of warning, I fancy. I suppose that story—of twelve years of solitary confinement for a two hours' train-ride—has done more to make me the kind of girl I am than any other one thing."

Dwight leaped to his feet, strode about the room. "It's horrible," he muttered, "horrible. God—— Well, we'll have to do our best to make up for it."

Southward went on. "I'm not particularly fond of my sex, you know. Hester likes women but I don't. I hate most of them. All except a few. I liked my grandmother. I like Hester and Charlotte and Gert Welch, and, yes, I like Pearl Manning, now. But as a whole, women make me tired. But that story of Charlotte's is the reason why, when I could, I've worked for suffrage. Of course I believe in the feminist movement. But I'm only mildly interested. As far as the franchise is concerned—I don't give a single solitary damn whether I ever vote or not. Every time I think of Charlotte though, it puts me into such a frenzy that the only way I can calm myself is to do something for women as a whole. So you might as well be prepared for that. I'll be always getting in and out of the suffrage movement, or boring you and myself to death and tiring us both out."

"That's a horrible future to contemplate," Dwight admitted. "And it adds another terror to matri—— Oh, father, here you are! This is Miss Southward Drake, father, and Friday night you're going to Shayneford where she lives, to be present when she marries me on Saturday."



CHAPTER VIII

HESTER and her mother sat in the garden. It was late in July, one of the rare hot days that the San Francisco summer sometimes delivers. Above them a sky of an intense foaming blue, but cloudless, held a huge blazing jewel of sun. Below, the great mass of pearl-white city dropped in precipitous masses from hill to hill until it reached the bay. Beyond, the water stretched blue as the sky and, over it, drifted white ferry-boats that might have been the clouds missing from that sky. The garden, thanks to Mrs. Crowell's persistent efforts, had turned from a neglected tangle to a cared-for, usable beauty-spot. The box-hedge that surrounded it had been clipped to symmetrical proportions. The rose-bushes that dotted it had been pruned to a fuller life. Against the box grew great starry masses of the California marguerite and against these high bushes of salmon-pink geranium. The day was warm enough for Hester to wear one of the white middy-suits left over from Shayneford days, and cool enough for Mrs. Crowell to throw a white woollen shawl over her shirt-waist. Both women were bare-headed. They sewed.

"I suppose, mother," Hester was saying, "we could go back to Shayneford now if you wish. I don't want ever to *live* there again myself. But now that we've respectably established my marriage, widowhood, and motherhood, I wouldn't mind going back to visit occasionally."

Mrs. Crowell started. She looked first at Hester's face, then at the baby carriage near. But that last look was merely mechanical. The hood of the perambulator was pulled close against the blinding California sunshine. Mrs. Crowell's foot was on one of the carriage wheels but she did not move it.

"I don't want to go back," she protested in a deep voice. "Never as long as I live. I love it out here. I couldn't bear to leave it. It's so free and so beautiful. There's so much hope in the air. I don't even want to go back to visit. But I may have to do that," she added in a lower tone. "I've been thinking for over a month now that I'd like to put the place in Dwight's hands to sell. I might have to go back to attend to the packing. There are some things I'd want to bring out here—the old furniture and silver

and pictures. But there's a lot I'd like to get rid of. I'd have to go through the garret myself though; nobody else could do that for me. Things have been accumulating for nearly forty years there. But, oh, there's such a lot of truck that I don't want to have here. It doesn't go. Oh, no, I don't want to stay there. I want to live here. I love it here, I love it," she asseverated passionately. "And then," she added, "do you suppose I could leave the baby now?"

"I hope not," Hester answered. "And I'm glad you feel that way about California and the West. Nothing would make me go back. My boy is a Native Son and I want to make a real Californian of him." Absently she arose and walked towards the centre of the garden between the hedges. Absently she began to pick a bunch of the geranium and marguerites.

Standing amidst the rivalling colour of the flowers and in the dazzling pour of the sunshine, Hester was as different a woman from what she had been as it is possible to imagine. Physical maternity had filled out her figure. It had broadened her hips and rounded her bosom. Spiritual maternity had written a whole new history on her face. The sallowness, the look of lassitude, had gone. Her skin had so quickened that the freckles stood out on it like sheer gold. Her eyes had cleared yet they seemed to have changed to a deeper blueness. Her teeth—and they had always been beautiful—revealed themselves now between lips of a firm deep pink. Her hair, which she continued to wear in a braided coronal, pinned in front with the little silver bow and arrow, sparkled as though it had been carved from massy gold. She moved from bush to bush with the vigour, the decision, the swiftness of perfect health and absolute happiness. She came back after a while to her seat, her arms full of flowers. She put these on the bench beside her and took up her sewing.

"Think of the joy of having the house full of flowers all the year round," she commented. "Yes, mother, this is our country now. We——"

The gate clicked. John Smith stepped into the garden.

"I'm here just for the day," he explained after a long while. "I had to come out here on a quick trip to Los Angeles. Of course I had to get to San Francisco although I've got to turn right round and go back to-night. I didn't want to write for fear you might not want to see me. And I had to see you. You don't mind, Hester?"

"No," Hester said, with her old-time simple frankness, gilded

with her new radiant happiness. "I'm glad. I should never have forgiven you if you hadn't come. Now tell me about everybody. First, Southward and Dwight."

"Oh, they're disgracefully happy. They enjoyed the South American trip enormously. Southward expects the baby—a son, she maintains—in the fall. Of course you know that though. She's delighted and perfectly well, has been from the beginning. They're going to stay at Long Lanes until the baby's six months old. They've done wonders with the old place."

"Yes. Southward's been sending me snap-shots right along. The rooms must be beautiful."

"Dwight is busy all the time doing magazine-stuff—articles, mainly. He has written his second boys' book. The first is a great success, you know. It's been out since the spring."

"Yes, he sent us a copy," Hester murmured again. "Now Edith?" she continued. "Tell me about her."

John's face shadowed. "Not such good news there," he said. "Edith isn't at all well. She's cured of course. But she's never quite rallied as she should. We're doing everything we can think of. We have the best doctors, specialists; and anything more devoted than Rena's nursing, it would be impossible to imagine. Yet I have a feeling that she's losing ground."

"Oh, I am so sorry." Hester's lips quivered; but her voice vibrated with deep, strong feeling. "I am so sorry. Edith has been so kind all her life. I cannot bear to think—and all of us so helpless. Could she come out here? I'd do anything on earth to make her happy."

John shook his head. "You couldn't move her. It would only be to die. She never says anything. But I know she clings to her own surroundings. She'd rather die at home."

"Oh," Hester said in a breaking voice, "oh." And then diversion came. The baby cried. Hester controlled herself at once.

Mrs. Crowell lifted the hood of the perambulator, reached under it. With quick adroit movements, she lifted the baby out and handed him to Hester. Hester's hand flew eagerly to him. She settled him in her lap; and then, very simply unlaced the middy-blouse and gave him her big pearly breast.

John watched.

Hester's son was a magnificent child. His hair was thick and curling, a brilliant coppery red. He had black eyes and a skin bursting with the colour that California paints on human flesh. He settled himself to the process of feeding with little liquid grunts of approval. One hand, infinitesimally brawny, pressed Hester's

breast. He sucked and grunted; dropped the nipple to stare with round black eyes at his grandmother; returned to it; sucked hard and grunted again. After a while, he dropped away and his eyelids drooped.

"I think I'll put him in his own bed now," Mrs. Crowell decided. She carried him into the house.

A silence fell on the two in the garden. "I see that you really have found your work, Hester," John said.

"Yes," Hester agreed.

"I'm sure it's the right work for you," John went on.

"Yes, it was the right work," Hester agreed again, "I have no doubts about that now."

"And no regrets?" John questioned.

"No regrets," Hester answered.

Another silence fell. Hester tucked some of the pink geraniums in her hair.

"You are beautiful now, Hester," John said. "You have fulfilled every prophecy that I made of you."

"Thank you. I am glad you think so. But I've paid." Hester lifted the sweep of heavy hair which fell down over her ear and showed the white at her temples. "You can't imagine how dumfounded I was when I saw the grey coming here. And after the baby was born, my hair began to come out. That really troubled me. That's my single vanity, you know—my hair."

"You've still got enough for three women," John asserted.

"I've still got enough to give me a good deal of trouble doing it when there's a baby round. Do you remember telling me that I was 'paintable'?"

"Perfectly."

"It may amuse you to know that a woman-artist here on the hill thinks so too. She has done our picture—the baby and me—in the garden here. It's to be exhibited in New York in the fall."

"I'll see it," John said. After another silence, "I suppose you'll tell me about all this sometime, Hester."

"I suppose I will, John," Hester answered.

Another silence followed. Mrs. Crowell broke it. She appeared in the doorway, holding the baby. "This young man won't go to sleep inside," she complained in tones that were full of pride. "Suppose you let him lie here in the sun a little longer, Hester."

"All right," Hester agreed.

Mrs. Crowell disappeared into the house.

The boy lay on his pillow, kicking his legs, thrashing his arms, gurgling and bubbling.

John rose.

"I'm going away now. Good-bye, Hester."

"Good-bye, John."

They shook hands. They kissed.

At the gate John turned. "Some day, Hester, perhaps."

Hester did not answer. She did not hear. She was looking at her son.

THE END



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